NATION
Why sell excess tickets: Delhi HC raps rlys
≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS
Tesla may debut in India by April, EVs likely from Rs 21L
≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS
Despite challenges, India eyes strong start at CT
≫ Page: 8 ≪

www.twitter.com/EnglishSalar
www.facebook.com/EnglishSalar
www.instagram.com/dailysalarenglish
youtube.com/@dailysalardigital

SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 20 FEBRUARY 2025 | THURSDAY | BENGALURU | 21 SHABAN, 1446 AH | Vol 4 | Issue No 51 | Pages: 8

Kashmiri medico ragged in Vijayapura college

VIJAYAPURA, 19 FEB

A second-year MBBS student was allegedly ragged by his seniors at Al-Ameen Medical College in Vijayapura. The victim, Hamim, hails from Anantnag, Kashmir. Vijayapura Superintendent of Police Lakshman Nimbaragi stated that statements from six students were recorded regarding the incident. They were booked under various anti-ragging laws and relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). The incident occurred on 18 February at 4pm when Hamim was watching a cricket match between the 2019 and 2022 batches. One of the seniors asked him to stay outside the boundary line.

—Salar News

>>>More on Page 2

Why give $21M to India: Trump on voter turnout fund

NEW YORK/FLORIDA, 19 FEB

President Donald Trump questioned the purpose of providing USD 21 million to India for "voter turnout" as he reiterated that the US "can hardly get in there" because of high Indian tariffs. Trump also said "India is one of the highest taxing countries in the world". Trump said he has a "lot of respect for India. I have a lot of respect for the Prime Minister," and noted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had visited the White House last week. "But we're giving USD 21 million for voter turnout. It's voter turnout in India. What about like voter turnout here?" *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

SC defers hearing on pleas against CEC appointments

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

Supreme Court on Wednesday adjourned the pleas against the appointments of the chief election commissioner (CEC) and election commissioners (EC) under the 2023 law. A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh indicated that the matter would be listed after the Holi festival break. Advocate Prashant Bhushan said the matter involved a short legal question -- whether the 2023 Constitution bench verdict should be followed for the appointment of the CEC and ECs through a panel involving the Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition and the Chief Justice of India or the 2023 law, which excludes the CJI from the panel. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

LOKAYUKTA GIVES CLEAN CHIT TO CM IN MUDA CASE

Lokayukta cites lack of proof in report to HC

BENGALURU, 19 FEB

Lokayukta police probing the MUDA site allotment case on Wednesday said the charges against Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and his wife Parvathi could not be proved for want of evidence.

Leader of Opposition in the Assembly, R Ashoka, addressing the media said the Lokayukta report giving clean chit to Siddaramaiah was on the expected lines, while the petitioner in the case, activist Snehamayi Krishna, told PTI: "Only those officials who have sold their conscience can give such a report".

The probing officers said they have submitted the final report to the High Court.

Besides Siddaramaiah and his wife, his brother-in-law Mallikarjuna Swamy and the land owner Devaraju are the accused.

The Lokayukta police said that further investigation will be conducted into the allegations of Mysore Urban Development Authority (MUDA) providing compensatory plots in the ratio of 50:50 from 2016 to 2024 and an additional final report will be submitted to the High Court under Section 173 (8) CrPC.

In the MUDA site allotment case, it is alleged that compensatory sites were allotted to Siddaramaiah's wife in an upmarket area in Mysuru, which had higher property value as compared to the location of her land which had been "acquired" by the MUDA.

The MUDA had allotted plots to Parvathi under a 50:50 ratio scheme in lieu of 3.16 acres of her land, where it developed a residential layout. Under the controversial scheme, MUDA

PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

allotted 50 per cent of developed land to the land losers in lieu of undeveloped land acquired from them for forming residential layouts.

It is alleged that Parvathi had no legal title over this 3.16 acres of land at survey number 464 of Kasare village, Kasaba hobli of Mysuru taluk.

The Lokayukta as well as the ED are probing the matter simultaneously. Reacting to the report, Krishna said, "The Lokayukta officials, who were ready to submit the report, which the entire country had been waiting for, have given me a notice. It seems that there is a lack of evidence for the allegations I have made." *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

TIMELINE OF MUDA CASE

- **AUGUST 2004:** CM's brother-in-law purchased 3.16 acres of 'agricultural' land.
- **OCTOBER 2010:** The land was gifted to his CM's wife Parvathi
- **JUNE 2014:** Parvathi seeks compensation against her land being used by the MUDA.
- **DECEMBER 2017** MUDA decides to award alternative sites to Parvathi.
- **JANUARY 2022** Parvathi gets 14 plots in Vijayanagar 3rd phase.
- **OCTOBER 2023** Govt scraps the 50:50 scheme.
- **26 JULY, 2024** Governor issues showcause notice to Siddaramaiah after being petitioned by social activists.
- **17 AUGUST, 2024** Governor accords investigation sanction against Siddaramaiah.

PARVESH HER DEPUTY?

1st time MLA, RSS leader Rekha Gupta is Delhi CM

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

First-time MLA Rekha Gupta will be the new Chief Minister of Delhi, BJP announced on Wednesday. Gupta has a 32-year association with the RSS.

Gupta was chosen as the Leader of the House in the Delhi Assembly at the BJP legislature party meeting. The party has returned to power in Delhi after over 27 years, ending the 10-year rule of the Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP.

Parvesh Verma is likely to be her deputy, according to sources.

Gupta and her Cabinet ministers will take the oath of office at the Ramlila Ground on Thursday. She will be the fourth woman chief minister of Delhi after Sushma Swaraj, Sheila Dikshit and Atishi.

She will be the only woman chief minister among the states being ruled by the BJP at present. The 50-year-old leader won from Shalimar Bagh, defeating AAP candidate Bandana Kumari by over 29,000 votes in the February 5 Assembly polls. All 48 newly-elected BJP MLAs attended the legislature party meeting in the presence of Central observers Ravi Shankar Prasad and O P Dhankar. Gupta's name was proposed by senior party leaders Parvesh Verma, Vijender Gupta and Satish Upadhyay. The announcement came 11 days after the results of the Delhi Assembly polls were declared on 8 February. The CM-designate met Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena at Raj Niwas to stake a claim in forming a BJP-led government in Delhi. In the recent assembly polls, the BJP won 48 out of the 70 assembly seats while AAP got 22 seats. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

I express my heartfelt gratitude to all the top leadership for trusting me and entrusting me with the responsibility of the CM. This trust and support of yours has given me new energy and inspiration
—Rekha Gupta, Delhi CM-designate

WHO IS REKHA GUPTA?

- Age: 50
- The lawyer is a 1st time MLA from Shalimar Bagh
- 4TH woman Delhi CM
- Started political career with ABVP at Daulat Ram College, Delhi University, in 1992
- 3-time MCD councillor
- Former mayor of the South Delhi Municipal Corporation
- National Vice President of the BJP Mahila Morcha
- Lost against AAP's Shelly Oberoi in 2022 mayoral polls
- Has long ties with RSS

CT STARTS AMID TIGHT SECURITY

KARACHI, 19 FEB

The ninth edition of ICC Champion Trophy began in Pakistan's Karachi on Wednesday amid tight security with the hosts playing against New Zealand. The tournament is the first major tournament to be hosted by the country after nearly 29 years, following security concerns after the 2009 attacks against the Sri Lankan team.

Reportedly at least 12,000 police forces have been deployed across Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi.

SWAT teams are reported be standing on reserve, 10,000 AI powered facial recognition cameras have been set up.

Additionally, Pakistan International Airlines has also arranged for nine chartered flights for players and high-profile guests. Meanwhile, after facing severe backlash on social media, Pakistan hoisted the Indian flag alongside other countries at the National Stadium in Karachi. Many speculated that it was a jibe against India who refused to travel to Pakistan and are instead set to play their games in Dubai. Reports suggest that the Pakistan Cricket Board was directive by ICC to hoist the flag. –

When the Pakistan fighter jets flew over the stadium, the decibel levels were so high New Zealand's Devon Conway ducked for cover and crowd in the stand was visibly scared.

—Agencies

>>>More on Page 8

K'taka to stop cash under Anna Bhagya, give 5kg rice

BENGALURU, 19 FEB

Karnataka will discontinue the direct benefit transfer of Rs 34 per kg rice for Anna Bhagya beneficiaries starting in February from February under the pre-poll Anna Bhagya guarantee, State Minister KH Muniyappa said on Wednesday.

Congress had promised to provide 10kg rice every month to each member of families falling below the poverty line (BPL). This includes 5kg rice supplied by Centre under the National Food Security Act, 2013.

However, due to an inadequate supply of food grains, the State had been transferring Rs 170 to beneficiaries' bank accounts instead, a practice that continued until January.

Congress had accused the Centre of attempting to sabotage Anna Bhagya scheme by withholding rice, despite sufficient stocks being available in warehouses.

The Minister stated that the State would require 2.1 lakh tonne of rice each month, costing Rs 536.71 crore.

"We will procure rice from the Centre at Rs 22.5 per kg. We have discussed this with Union Food and Civil Supplies Minister Pralhad Joshi," Muniyappa said.

He added that Joshi had assured him that the Centre would supply rice consistently for the next two years.

According to Muniyappa, the Centre procures rice from various states at Rs 40 per kg, which includes transportation costs. *—PTI*

WORKER DIES IN KALABURAGI, BODY DRAGGED

KALABURAGI, 19 FEB

A heart attack death at Sri Cement Company in Kodla village, Sedam taluk, Kalaburagi sparked widespread outrage on Wednesday after a viral video showed the body of a deceased worker being dragged by the staff in an inhumane manner.

The worker, a 35-year-old Chandan Singh from Bihar, collapsed and died while on duty. It is believed that he suffered a heart attack, triggered by low blood pressure. Instead of treating the body with dignity, staff at the plant dragged the body, prompting fierce criticism on social media following which police arrested six people including Haider Ali, Ravi Shankar, Harinder Nishad, Ajay, Ramesh Chandra, and Akhilesh were arreted. "If a labourer dies, a case is registered against the management, which might bring to notice that due to the dust from the plant, the locals are suffering from asthma, and heart attacks. The officials are ignoring this," alleges Umesh Pandusingh Chauhan, a member of the Malkheda Gram Panchayat. *—Salar News*

SNUBS REPORT

Sangam water fit for drinking, 'snan': Yogi

LUCKNOW, 19 FEB

The water at the Sangam is fit for both bathing and ritual drinking (aachman), Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said Wednesday, amid claims it may contain high levels of faecal bacteria.

"This time, 81 drains have been tapped, treating 261 MLD of sewage. In January and February, faecal coliform levels at the Sangam nose were found to be below 2,500 MPN per 100 ml" he said. In contrast, a government data reavealed that Ganga water at the Sangam in Prayagraj is currently unsafe for bathing as it exceeds the prescribed limit for biological oxygen demand, a key parameter to determine water quality. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 4

FAECES, SEWAGE IN SANGAM WATER

NGT on Tuesday summoned the UP officials after a pollution board report found the water for Sangam to be contaminated with alarming levels of faecal bacteria.

HERE IS WHAT THE REPORT SAID:

- 1,400 times more coliform in Ganga and 660 times in Yamuna. Coliform levels are indicator of sewage and human and animal excreta.
- Water unfit for bathing and drinking.
- Coliform levels must not exceed 500 MPN (Most Probable Number)per 100ml.
- It reached a 7,00,000 MPN/100ml in Ganga on 19 Jan and 3,30,000 MPN/100ml in Yamuna.

Case filed after students clean drains in Yadgir

YADGIR, 19 FEB

A suo motu case has been filed by the Child Rights Commission after reports emerged of primary school students in Kyatanal village, Vadagera, Yadgir, being forced to clean a drainage system. **Salar News** reported this first on 18 February in the article titled **'Yadgir students forced to clean drain, activist seeks action'**. It is claimed that the school headmaster provided the children with cleaning tools and instructed them to clean the drain.

Upon learning of the report, CS Mudhol, Deputy Director of School Education, ordered the Shahapur Block Education Officer (BEO) to investigate the matter. Shahapur BEO, YH Harga, confirmed that preliminary investigations revealed the headmaster directed students to clean up garbage near the school and around a borewell. A showcause notice has been issued to the headmaster.

SALAR IMPACT

An investigation committee has been formed. The committee has been tasked with submitting a report promptly.

Shashidhar Kosambe, a member of the Karnataka State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (KSCPCR), also took action, contacting officials to gather further details. The Deputy Director has been instructed to visit the school and submit a report to the commission. *—Salar News*

RANNA VAIBHAV FESTIVAL

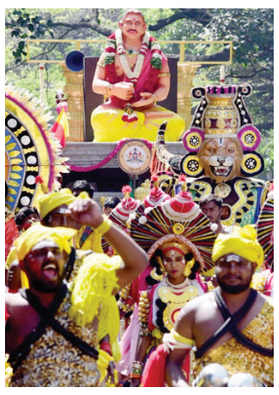


PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

'Ranna Rath', part of the Ranna Vaibhav 2025 Cultural Festival began in front of the Bhuvaneshwari statue at Vidhana Soudha on Wednesday. The festival, dedicated to Kavi Chakravarthi Ranna, will take place between 22-24 February in Mudhol and Belagali

Govt orders probe into Shivamogga tiger death

BENGALURU, 19 FEB

Karnataka Minister for Forest, Ecology and Environment Eshwar Khandre has directed officials to investigate the death of a male tiger, whose carcass was found in the backwaters of Ambaligola reservoir at Byrapura in Shivamogga district. The Minister, in an 18 February note addressed to the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Chief Wildlife Warden, instructed them to investigate media reports that the tiger also had a bullet (pellet) injury and submit a report within 10 days. Citing media reports about locals expressing suspicion that the animal may have been killed elsewhere and dumped here, as no tiger has ever been seen in the area where the carcass was found, Khandre has also instructed for investigation in this matter. *—PTI*

PVR INOX fined ₹1 lakh for excessive ads

BENGALURU, 19 FEB

A district consumer court here has found theatre chain PVR INOX at fault for delaying film screenings by airing excessive advertisements, calling it an "unfair" trade practice. The court also ordered the multiplex chain to pay Rs one lakh in punitive damages and ensure that the actual start time of movies is clearly communicated to viewers. The case was brought forward by a Bengaluru resident who, along with two family members, attended a 4.05 pm show of Sam Bahadur in December 2023. However, the feature film only began at 4.30 pm after a long series of advertisements, disrupting their schedule and wasting their time. The complainant was awarded Rs 20,000 for the inconvenience and mental distress caused, along with Rs 8,000 to cover litigation costs. *—PTI*

2,000 priests to be certified at Maharaja Sanskrit college

MYSURU, 19 FEB

The Principal of Maharaja Sanskrit College Prof Sathyanarayana said the agama convocation ceremony to trained priests will be held on 21 February at 11.00am in Jaganmohan Palace auditorium in the city. Students from around 38 different educational institutions will be felicitated on the day of the event. Nearly 2,000 students have graduated from the Pravara and Praveen examinations, which were relaunched five years. Exams from 2019-2022 were delayed due to the pandemic and only conducted in 2022 and saw 2,258 take the test. The Hindu Religious Institutions & Charitable Endowments Department of the Government of Karnataka is involved in providing training to the students. *—Salar News*

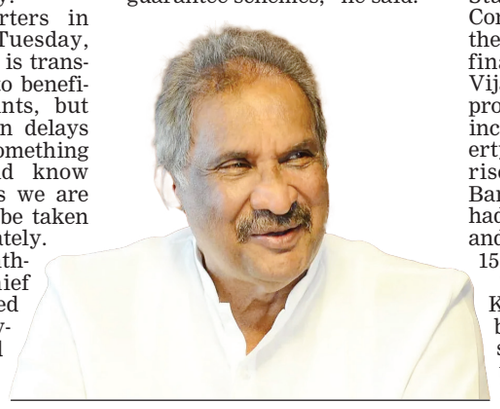
George says guarantee funds are not salaries; BJP fumes

Vijayendra says State is heading towards bankruptcy

BENGALURU, 19 FEB

Energy Minister KJ George's remark that funds from the guarantee schemes are "not like a monthly salary," in response to complaints about delays in payments to beneficiaries has drawn sharp criticism from opposition BJP leaders on Wednesday.

Speaking to reporters in Chitradurga on Tuesday, George said, "Money is transferred every month to beneficiaries' bank accounts, but there may have been delays for some. Is there something the Minister should know about it? As soon as we are informed, steps will be taken to rectify it immediately. This is not like a monthly salary. The Chief Minister has assured that all pending payments will be cleared by May, as promised."



Reacting sharply, the Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Assembly, R Ashoka, questioned the Minister's attitude toward voters. "Is this your respect for voters? They are not begging for Gruha Lakshmi and Anna Bhagya funds. People did not ask you to introduce these guarantee schemes," he said.

BJP State President BY Vijayendra alleged that the State was heading towards "bankruptcy" due to the financial burden of the five guarantee schemes introduced by the Congress government.

Vijayendra also claimed that the state-owned Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) was on the verge of closure due to financial mismanagement. Vijayendra claimed that the property guidance value had increased by 30 per cent, property registration fees had risen by 600 per cent, Bangalore Metro Rail fares had gone up by 50 per cent, and milk prices had surged by 15 per cent.

"The financial situation of Karnataka is going from bad to worse, despite the state government having taken loans amounting to Rs 1.19 lakh crore in the past two years," he alleged. He further claimed that state Energy Minister K J George had stated that the Public Works Department, the Irrigation Department, and other government departments in Karnataka had not paid their electricity bills, with total dues reaching around Rs 6,000 crore. "Because of the decisions taken by the state government, Karnataka is clearly heading for bankruptcy," he charged. He alleged that never in Karnataka's history had the state been in such a dire financial condition.

"The Chief Minister, who will be presenting his 16th budget on 7 March should explain to the people of Karnataka the true financial situation of the state. We demand that Siddaramaiah release a white paper on Karnataka's financial condition," Vijayendra said. *—PTI*

DONT' PANIC

Border districts on high alert amid bird flu scare

BELAGAVI/BIDAR, 19 FEB

Following the outbreak of avian flu (H5N1) in neighbouring states of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, Karnataka's Health Department has announced a high alert in its border districts of Belagavi, Bidar and Ballari, blocking poultry trucks at every entry point.

The State health department, in its meeting held in Bengaluru on Monday, directed its officials to start a surveillance of the situation, especially among poultry workers. The department also urged the people not to panic.

The meeting was chaired by Principal Secretary (Health) Harsh Gupta.

Thousands of poultry were culled and buried in Maharashtra. Even animals and other birds were also found infected with the virus in that state.

Requesting anonymity, an official said the health department has deployed a few staff members to help the police in checking every truck that enters the state from Maharashtra.

Sameer Bahewadi, who owns poultry farms in Belagavi and Vijaypura districts, said there are rumours that some poultry farmers in Maharashtra were culling the birds and throwing them into lakes and rivers instead burying them. This has created panic among people, he said.

An official from Belagavi district administration, requesting anonymity, said people have been asked to buy products from only local farms. *—Salar News*

ANOTHER BUILDING FALLS

A two-storey house collapsed in Thippasandra's Jeevan Bhima Nagar while construction work was underway on the foundation of an adjacent building on Wednesday. No one was injured PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

No illegalities in land purchased 40 yrs ago: HDK

BENGALURU, 19 FEB

With revenue department officials conducting a survey of land belonging to him in Ramanagara district, Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy on Wednesday asserted that there are no illegalities in the land he purchased about forty years ago.

The JD(S) leader, claiming that he was being targeted, also hit out at the ruling Congress government in the state and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.

Speaking to reporters here, he pointed out that in 1986-87 itself, Congress leader C M Lingappa and Ramachandra, a zilla panchayat member, had submitted a petition to the then Chief Minister, Prime Minister and Home Minister and others, alleging that the land was purchased illegally. *—ANI*

Kashmiri MBBS student ragged in Vijayapura medical college

VIJAYAPURA, 19 FEB

A second-year MBBS student was allegedly ragged by his seniors at Al-Ameen Medical College in Vijayapura. The victim, Hamim, hails from Anantnag, Kashmir. Vijayapura Superintendent of Police Lakshman Nimbaragi stated that statements from six students were recorded regarding the incident. The incident occurred on 18 February at 4pm when Hamim was watching a cricket match between the 2019 and 2022 batches. One of the seniors asked him to stay outside the boundary line. Last year, one of them had confronted him in the mess during dinner for not greeting him, which led to further harassment.

When Hamim attempted to stay near the field, the seniors ordered him to leave.

He was asked to give the "Al-Ameen salute," sing songs, and dance. In response, he attempted to record a video of the ragging, asserting that such demands were both inappropriate and against college regulations.

Later that night, he was brutally assaulted by six seniors. They beat him, forced him to record a video apologising, and even threatened him. He requested Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to intervene and take action against the perpetrators.

> **I have spoken to @CMofKarnataka @siddaramaiah ji about this unfortunate incident. He has assured me that the police have filed an FIR & necessary action will be taken. The four accused of perpetrating this ragging/ thrashing have been identified**
>
> -Omar Abdullah, J&K Chief Minister

"We the students from out stations urge the Chief Minister to intervene i, ensure swift justice, and initiate strict action against those responsible to prevent such incidents from recurring in educational institutions," he said. *—Salar News*

Water security needs unity beyond politics, says DKS

BENGALURU, 19 FEB

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Wednesday emphasised the importance of securing, recycling and reusing water as part of the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM).

Shivakumar was at the All India State Water Ministers Conference held in Udaipur, Rajasthan. During the conference, he presented proposals and discussed the pressing water-related issues faced by various states.

He said, "The focus is on securing and reusing water. We've presented our proposals, raised issues, and requested help from other states to address river linking and interstate water disputes. We need to move beyond politics and collaborate to resolve these issues. I will meet the minister again on the 26th to discuss financial support and strategies for utilising the 30 million gallons of water currently unused due to deshielding, as well as safeguard Tundra water."

Shivakumar addressed concerns related to river linking and interstate water disputes, urging state leaders to put aside political differences and work towards solutions for the common good. "We have to secure water, recycle water, prevent water wastage, and reuse it. This is the theme we are focusing on. We have given our proposals, and all ministers have raised their respective problems. But we are requesting assistance from more states, without any political bias," he said.

Shivakumar said he would meet the Union Jal Shakthi Minister on 25 February to discuss issues pertaining to all irrigation projects in the state.

Asked about a report that the water at Prayagraj was not suitable for bathing, he said, "I have no comments on this. I will respond to any query pertaining to my State." *—ANI*

KRS stretch to be named after Siddaramaiah

MYSURU, 19 FEB

Chamarajanagar MLA K Harishgowda on Wednesday reiterated that KRS stretch from Lakshminarayana temple till Royal Inn junction will be named after Chief Minister Siddaramaiah even though Siddaramaiah gave oral directions to him to stop demanding to name the stretch after him owing to controversy surrounding the stretch.

He said as the Chief Minister contributed a lot for improvement of health infrastructure including Jayadeva heart hospital, trauma care, district hospital, ayurvedic hospital, this stretch will be named after him.

He said that he requested MP Yaduveer Wadiyar to support his cause. *—Salar News*

Mysuru layoffs: Infosys denies using force

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

Infosys on Wednesday said it did not use force or intimidation when it laid off trainees at Mysuru campus over performance-related issues. The IT company said it has explained the circumstances to the labour department.

Shaji Mathew, Chief Human Resources Officer at Infosys, said the percentage of failure in internal assessment this year has been "slightly higher", but dismissed charges that the tests had been designed for failure.

On whether the layoffs would severely dent Infosys' brand as the company goes out to campuses for FY26 hiring, he said that plans to hire 20,000 freshers for next fiscal are on track and they should have nothing to worry about as they will get one of the best corporate training.

Mathew said that given that the company invests money and effort to select and put trainees through the training program "it is in the interest of Infosys to see that all these people are successful, and that is when we are able to put them into our projects".

- Human Resources Officer said the percentage of failure in internal assessment this year has been "slightly higher"

"There is training investment that goes in and we also pay them salary during the training...It is not in the interest of the company to let any of these people go...It is a loss to them of course, it is a loss to us as well," he said adding that the particular batch of trainees had not cleared internal assessments after three attempts. *—ANI*

5 held at KIA with 25kg drugs from Thailand

BENGALURU, 19 FEB

The Narcotics Control Bureau said it arrested five people at Kempegowda International Airport for allegedly carrying 20kgs high-grade cannabis during their return from a trip to Thailand fully paid by drug traffickers.

Those arrested were used as "mules/carriers" to bring the contraband, hydroponic weed, from Thailand by people unknown to them.

The five, aged between 25-35 years, were told that cannabis business was not an offence in India and in case they were intercepted, arrangements would be made for their release, the anti-narcotics agency said in a statement. They said these unknown people sponsored leisure trips to Thailand in exchange for carrying a bag containing cannabis.

They also said if any person receives a call about such a sponsored trip abroad or has any information about drug trafficking, they should dial its MANAS helpline number at 1933. *—PTI*

TOXIC WASTE BLAMED

Mass fish deaths in Bidar lake raise concerns

YOHAN P HONNADI
BIDAR, 19 FEB

A large number of fish have died after contaminated water flowed into Papanash Lake, a site of religious and historical significance in Bidar. The Papanash Shiva Temple and its associated lake are considered sacred, believed to cleanse devotees of their sins.

The incident occurred near the Papanashini Shivalinga temple.

Social activist Rohan Kumar took to social media to express his outrage, stating, "The district administration's negligence is responsible for the mass death of fish in the lake. The development projects aimed at improving the lake's condition and protecting the environment have failed."

He further raised concerns about pollution.

The lake has been heavily polluted by sewage from nearby areas, along with religious offerings such as flowers, fruits, and sugarcane PHOTO: SALAR

The lake has been heavily polluted by sewage from nearby areas, along with religious offerings such as flowers, fruits, banana leaves, sugarcane, and decorative items. A few months ago, the Bidar Urban Development Authority sanctioned Rs 2 crore for the lake's restoration. Grills and electric lights were installed around its perimeter, but due to poor maintenance, solid waste continues to be dumped into the water. Once surrounded by lush green trees, the area has now dried up, causing concern among environmentalists.

State Wildlife Board member Vinay Kumar Malge told **Salar News**, "It is painful to see Papanash Lake fall into such a state due to mismanagement. A month ago, concerns about water depletion were raised, but no action was taken to prevent the outflow of water. The deaths have raised questions about the lake's condition." *—Salar News*

Residents warned against snakes in homes amid heat

BENGALURU, 19 FEB

As temperatures soar, snakes are seeking refuge in homes, shoes, and apartment complexes. The extreme heat is forcing them out of their underground shelters, increasing sightings near forested regions.

The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) has been getting complaints about snake encounters across the City. Cobras and other species have been found hiding in courtyards, backyards, and even inside footwear.

To address the issue, BBMP's forest department is working closely with renowned snake rescuer Snake Mohan to safely capture and release the reptiles into the wild. Reports indicate that at least eight snakes are being rescued daily.

Authorities are urging residents to take precautions, such as checking shoes before wearing them and being vigilant around flower pots and shaded areas where snakes may seek shelter. Experts advise against attacking or provoking snakes upon sighting; instead, they recommend immediately contacting BBMP or professional rescuers for safe removal.

With temperatures expected to rise further, authorities remain on high alert to manage the increasing number of snake sightings and ensure public safety. *—Agencies*

Jaishankar to visit South Africa for G20 meeting

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will be on a two-day visit to South Africa beginning 20 February to participate in the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting. The minister is expected to hold a few bilateral meetings on the margins of the meet. South Africa is currently the chair of the grouping. "EAM S Jaishankar will be visiting Johannesburg, South Africa on 20 & 21 February 2025 to participate in the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting (FMM) at the invitation of the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of South Africa, Mr. Ronald Lamola," the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement. The minister's participation will "strengthen" India's engagement with G20 countries and "bolster voice of the Global South." —*PTI*

FIR against AIADMK members in cash for jobs case

NEW DELHI, FEB 19

The CBI filed an FIR against AIADMK Union Secretary K Vijaya Nallathambi, former Tamil Nadu Minister Rajenthra Bhalaji and party worker Mariyappan for allegedly taking Rs 30 lakh after promising jobs, officials said. The CBI initiated the action on the order of the Madras High Court which had handed over the case to the agency in January after the state prosecution could not file a compliance report. The case pertains to a complaint by a shopkeeper S Ravindran, who had alleged that he paid Rs 30 lakh to Nallathambi who promised to make Ravindran's nephew a district manager. Nallathambi had reportedly alleged that Bhalaji had collected money from various individual assuring jobs. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

'Shinde would've been CM, but BJP, MVA blocked it'

MUMBAI, 19 FEB

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut claimed that Uddhav Thackeray planned to make Eknath Shinde the Chief Minister of Maharashtra after the 2019 polls but was blocked by BJP and MVA allies including Sharad Pawar. "The BJP did not fulfil the promise of sharing the CM's post with the Shiv Sena, that was why Shinde lost the chance to head the government," he told reporters. "Shinde wanted to become CM, but leaders of the MVA refused to work under him." On Tuesday, Shinde, now the deputy chief minister along with Ajit Pawar, had said the Shiv Sena split because of the attraction of the chief minister's post. "You started treating your colleagues like they are your servants," he said, in a reference to Thackeray splitting the Shiv Sena in 2019 to become CM himself. —*PTI*

Scuffle breaks out between Bittu's staff, cops

CHANDIGARH, 19 FEB

Heated arguments and a scuffle broke out on Wednesday between Union minister Ravneet Singh Bittu's security personnel and some Chandigarh policemen upon his return from near the official residence of Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann here. Bittu, Union Minister of State for Food Processing Industries and Railways, reached close to the residence of Mann here to meet him in connection with the cases registered against two of his supporters but he was not allowed to meet. It was alleged that a Chandigarh policeman attempted to pull out one of Bittu's security staff from the vehicle he was driving. The security staff driving the vehicle shot back at the Chandigarh cop. —*PTI*

After 32 yrs in RSS, Rekha gets Delhi crown

Following her swearing-in, she will be the only woman CM in any of the states ruled by BJP

Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva, with party leader and Delhi Chief Minister-designate Rekha Gupta, the party's Central observer Ravi Shankar Prasad, and party leaders Satish Upadhyay, and Deputy Chief Minister Parvesh Verma after BJP legislature party meeting, at the party office, in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

Former DUSU president and first-time MLA Rekha Gupta, who has had a long association with the RSS and is set to become the fourth woman chief minister of Delhi, has worked extensively for women's welfare.

Born in Haryana's Julana, Gupta is a BCom graduate from Delhi University's Daulat Ram College. She later earned a law degree from Chaudhary Charan Singh University, Meerut, and also practised as an advocate.

Gupta, who has had a 32-year association with the RSS, began her political journey with the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) at Delhi University's Daulat Ram College in 1992. In 1995-96, she was the secretary of the Delhi University Students' Union and was its president in 1996-97.

In 2002, she joined the BJP and has been the national secretary of the party's youth wing. Gupta has also served as the BJP's women wing in charge in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

After being elected as a councillor from North Pitampura in 2007, Gupta worked for the welfare of women and children. She launched initiatives like the Sumedha Yojana, which supported economically weaker female students in pursuing higher education.

She was elected councillor thrice -- 2007-2012, 2012-17 and of Shalimar Bagh from 2022-25. As the head of the Women Welfare and Child Development Committee of the civic body, she led empowerment campaigns for women.

Following her swearing-in, she will be the only woman chief minister in any of the states being currently ruled by the BJP. —*PTI*

Many congratulations to Rekha Gupta ji on becoming the Chief Minister of Delhi. I hope that she will fulfill all the promises made to the people of Delhi. We will support her in every work for the development and welfare of the people of Delhi

-Arvind Kejriwal, AAP National Convenor

I extend my hearty congratulations and best wishes to Mrs. @gupta_rekha ji on being elected the leader of the BJP Legislative Party

-Amit Shah, Union Home Minister

It is a matter of happiness that Delhi will be led by a woman. I hope that the promises made to the people of Delhi will be fulfilled. You will get the full support of Aam Aadmi Party

-Atishi , Former Delhi CM

SC defers hearing on pleas against CEC, EC appointments

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

Supreme Court on Wednesday adjourned the pleas against the appointments of the chief election commissioner (CEC) and election commissioners (EC) under the 2023 law.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh indicated that the matter would be listed after the Holi festival break due to paucity of time. However, no date was fixed for hearing the matter.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for petitioner NGO Association for Democratic Reforms, said it was an important issue which required an urgent consideration.

He said the matter involved a short legal question -- whether the 2023 Constitution bench verdict should be followed for the appointment of the CEC and ECs through a panel involving the Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition and the Chief Justice of India or the 2023 law, which excludes the CJI from the panel.

Meanwhile, TMC MP Mahua Moitra has moved the Supreme Court against the provision of the 2023 law over the appointments of CEC and the ECs.

She argued that Section 7 of the impugned Act allowed an "executive-dominated" selection panel to constitute the EC by recommending appointment of the CEC and other ECs.

"In doing so, the impugned Act allows the executive to influence the composition of the EC and defeats the now well-established principle of free and fair elections, which requires an insulated, nonpartisan and fiercely independent EC to conduct and supervise the election process," added the plea.

On 18 February, the top court said it would take up on "priority basis" the pleas against the appointments of the CEC and ECs under the 2023 law.

Bhushan said the government by appointing the new CEC and EC under the 2023 law was making a "mockery of democracy". The apex court's verdict held that leaving the appointment in the hands of the executive would be detrimental to the health of the country's democracy and fair elections. —*PTI with Agencies*

Gyanesh assumes charge as CEC; Vivek Joshi as EC

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

Gyanesh Kumar on Wednesday took over as the 26th Chief Election Commissioner, while Vivek Joshi assumed charge as an Election Commissioner. Sukhbir Singh Sandhu is the other election commissioner.

An Election Commissioner since March 2024, Kumar was elevated as the CEC on Monday.

Gyanesh Kumar replaced Rajiv Kumar, who demitted office on Tuesday, as head of the poll panel. At 58, Joshi is one of the youngest members to be a part of the poll panel.

Joshi could possibly supervise the conduct of the Lok Sabha elections in 2029 as the next CEC. —*PTI*

SHIVAJI BIRTH ANNIVERSARY

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis pays tribute to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj on his 395th birth anniversary on Wednesday, hailing him as a management guru and an able administrator who set an example of running a welfare state. Meanwhile, Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said the majority of Goa's population was saved from being forcibly converted to Christianity during Portuguese rule, thanks to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj **PHOTO: PTI**

Voter list tampering on massive scale, says Kharge

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

Days after a major organisational rejig in the party, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Wednesday flagged the issue of alleged "voter list manipulation" and claimed that it is happening on a large scale in elections.

Addressing general secretaries and in-charges, including those appointed last week, at a meeting held at the party's headquarters at Indira Bhawan here, Kharge emphasised the importance of promoting those people who are committed to the ideology of the Congress and stand with us like a rock even in adverse circumstances.

He noted that Rahul Gandhi also raised a question about this in the Lok Sabha.

"All of you will realise that these days the names of our supporters are deleted from the voters list. Or the name is removed and added to the adjacent booth. New names are added by the BJP just before the election. This rigging has to be stopped at all costs," the Congress chief asserted.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge with party leader Rahul Gandhi and party leader KC Venugopal arrives for a meeting of the party's general secretaries and state in-charges, in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

Kharge pointed out that earlier the Chief Justice was also included in the selection committee of Chief Election Commission (CEC) by the order of the Supreme Court but the CJI was removed from the panel by the Modi government.

Kharge also hinted at some more changes in the organisation, saying some changes have already taken place and some more are in the offing.

Among those who attended the meeting were former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi, senior leaders Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, K C Venugopal and Jairam Ramesh, and all general secretaries and in-charges in various states. —*PTI*

TN ready for language war, says Udayanidhi

CHENNAI, 19 FEB

A battle between Tamil Nadu's ruling DMK and BJP - over the centre's three-language policy and the 'imposition of Hindi' - ramped up after Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin said "states that accept Hindi lose their mother tongue" and that his state is ready for a 'language war'.

Stalin also doubled down on Chief Minister MK Stalin's "blackmail" swipe at Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, pointing out the state is only demanding its due, both in terms of central government funds for education and money due from devolution of taxes.

DMK stepped up its fight against alleged "Hindi imposition" by the Centre by launching a Kolam campaign, drawing of colourful patterns using rice flour on streets, to show Opposition.

DMK President and Chief Minister MK Stalin posted in social media, a poem of Bharathidasan that wondered whether putting an end to Hindi was not compulsory for them if Hindi is compulsory. The poet directly addresses Hindi language in his verses and the poem asserts that Hindi's "conspiracy" would not succeed.

PHOTO: PTI

Bharathidasan (1891-1964) is a celebrated poet of Tamil Nadu. Stalin also tagged a video clip of women drawing Kolam on the streets here.

"Where is Tamil Nadu's funds? Stop Hindi Imposition," and "Do not betray" were among the slogans that were written on roads alongside kolams (rangoli), a DMK campaign. DMK leader and Industries Minister TRB Rajaa said in a social media post that @DMK_Chennai has "sown the seeds," and said: "#StopHindiImposition, Well done#ChennaiZoneDmkITWing." —*PTI*

Rajasthan budget eyes jobs, $350B economy by 2030

JAIPUR, 19 FEB

Recruitment for up to 2.75 lakh positions in the government and private sector, water supply projects, and the construction of nine greenfield expressways were the highlights of the Rajasthan Budget 2025-26 presented by state Finance Minister Diya Kumari in the assembly on Wednesday.

While presenting the Rs 5.37-lakh crore Budget, Kumari, who is also the Deputy Chief Minister of the state, announced that 20 lakh new houses will be provided with drinking water connections and Rs 400 crore will be spent for this purpose.

"We are committed to creating a USD 350 billion economy by 2030... We have increased capital expenditure by more than 40 per cent in a short period and have constructed more than 9,600 km of new roads and upgraded more than 13,000 km of roads," Kumari said.

Addressing press conference, Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma said Budget will ensure development of state. —*PTI*

CONGRESS ATTACKS PM

SEC seeks India's help to serve legal notice in Adani's $250B bribery case

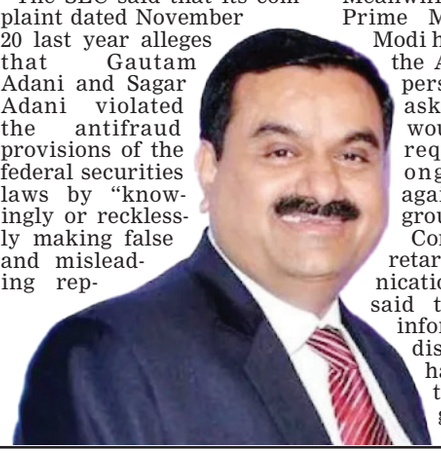
NEW YORK, 19 FEB

The US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) has told a federal judge here that its efforts to serve its complaint on Gautam Adani and Sagar Adani in the alleged bribery scheme are "ongoing", including through a request for assistance to the Indian authorities.

The SEC submitted a status update Tuesday to Judge Nicholas Garaufis at the United States District Court, Eastern District of New York regarding its efforts to serve its complaint on Gautam Adani and Sagar Adani.

The SEC said that both Gautam Adani and Sagar Adani "are located in India, and the SEC's efforts to serve them there are ongoing, including through a request for assistance to the Indian authorities to effect service under the Hague Service Convention for Service Abroad of Judicial and Extrajudicial Documents in Civil or Commercial Matters."

The SEC said that its complaint dated November 20 last year alleges that Gautam Adani and Sagar Adani violated the antifraud provisions of the federal securities laws by "knowingly or recklessly making false and misleading representations concerning Adani Green Energy Ltd in connection with a September 2021 debt offering by Adani Green.



PM has declared Adani issue personal matter: Cong

Meanwhile, Congress said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has already declared the Adani issue to be a personal matter and asked whether he would oblige the SEC request in the ongoing probe against the business group.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the SEC has just informed a New York district court that it has sought the assistance of the Modi government to serve complaints on the violations of US laws by Gautam Adani and some of his colleagues.

- Adani is being indicted by the US Department of Justice for his role in an alleged years-long scheme to pay USD 250 million bribes to Indian officials in exchange for favourable solar power contracts

Adani is being indicted by the US Department of Justice for his role in an alleged years-long scheme to pay USD 250 million bribes to Indian officials in exchange for favourable solar power contracts. —*PTI*

Why give $21M: Trump slams voter turnout fund

NEW YORK/FLORIDA, 19 FEB

President Donald Trump questioned the purpose of providing USD 21 million to India for "voter turnout" as he reiterated that the US "can hardly get in there" because of high Indian tariffs.

Trump also said "India is one of the highest taxing countries in the world".

He made these remarks after Elon Musk-led DOGE's (Department of Government Efficiency) disclosed that USAID contributed USD 21 million to Election Commission for boosting voter turnout.

On 16 February, The Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), led by billionaire SpaceX CEO Musk, listed items on which the "US taxpayer dollars were going to be spent" and the list included "USD 21M for voter turnout in India."

DOGE noted that all of the items have been cancelled.

The list also included USD 29 million to "strengthening political landscape in Bangladesh", USD 20 million for "fiscal federalism" and USD 19 million for "biodiversity conversation" in Nepal as well as USD 47 million for "improving learning outcomes in Asia".

PHOTO: PTI

Trump said he has a "lot of respect for India. I have a lot of respect for the Prime Minister," and noted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had visited the White House last week.

"But we're giving USD 21 million for voter turnout. It's voter turnout in India. What about like voter turnout here?" —*PTI*

Kerala: 50 hurt as firecrackers go off at football match

T'PURAM, 19 FEB

Malappuram, 19 Feb

Over 50 people were injured when firecrackers misfired and fell among the spectators of a Sevens football match at a stadium in the Areekode area of this district on Tuesday, police said here.

Among those injured, two are admitted to a hospital, police said.

The injuries of others who sought treatment were not serious, they added.

On Wednesday, police registered a case against the organisers. According to the police, the incident occurred when firecrackers were set off just before the match. The firecrackers misfired and fell among the spectators seated near the ground. —*PTI*

Badaun temple & mosque case to be heard on 10 March

BUDAUN, 19 FEB

A Badaun court would on 10 March take up a temple-mosque dispute after the hearing on Wednesday was adjourned due to the continuing lawyers' strike. Fast-track court civil judge (senior division) Amit Kumar adjourned the hearing in the Neelkanth Mahadev Temple vs Jama Masjid Intazamia Committee case. The court on 11 February repeatedly summoned the advocate representing the Intazamia Committee, but none appeared. The court then granted the Muslim side a final opportunity and scheduled the next hearing for 19 February. —*PTI*

Five-year-old shot dead outside MP marriage venue

MORENA, 19 FEB

In a shocking incident, a five-year-old boy was shot dead outside a marriage hall in Madhya Pradesh's Morena district, police said on Wednesday. Gappu Shakya, the victim, was attending the wedding of his maternal aunt in Jaura along with his family when the incident took place on Tuesday, said an official. As he was playing outside Shivhare Dharamshala, the wedding venue, a man on a motorbike shot him and fled. The accused was identified from the CCTV footage and a manhunt was on to nab him. —*PTI*

Teen poses as Jay Shah to extort money from MLA

HARIDWAR, 18 FEB

Uttarakhand Police has arrested a 19-year-old man for allegedly posing as Home Minister Amit Shah's son and demanding Rs 5 lakh from BJP MLA from Haridwar's Ranipur, Adesh Chauhan, over the phone, an official said on Tuesday. Haridwar Senior Superintendent of Police Pramod Singh Dobal said that 19-year-old Priyanshu Pant, who called the MLA and demanded money, was arrested by Haridwar Police from Delhi late on Monday evening, while Uvesh Ahmed, who was involved with him in the plan, was arrested from Rudrapur in Udham Singh Nagar district. Dobal added that Gaurav Nath, who was also involved in the scheme, is being searched for. He also mentioned that the three accused had attempted to extort money from two other Uttarakhand MLAs -- Nainital MLA Sarita Arya and Rudrapur MLA Shiv Arora -- by promising to make them ministers. Cases have also been registered in Nainital and Rudrapur in connection with this matter. It has been learned that the three youths, in pursuit of a luxurious life, used to call MLAs and demand money. —*PTI*

Why sell excess tickets: Delhi HC raps rlys

The High Court was hearing a PIL on safety measures to prevent stampedes

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

The stampede was caused by several factors, but the most critical was the fact that station authorities continued to sell around 3,000 over two hours amid the Maha Kumbh PHOTO: PTI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday came down heavily on the Railways over the stampede at the New Delhi railway station that killed 18 people, and questioned the need for selling tickets exceeding the capacity of passengers in a coach.

The crush was caused by several factors, but the most critical was the fact station authorities continued to sell tickets - around 3,000 over two hours amid the Maha Kumbh.

The observation was made by a division bench of Chief Justice DK Upadhyay and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela while hearing a plea which sought safety measures to avoid stampedes at railway stations in the future.

The court acknowledged that on "rush days" the Railways could, within reason, accommodate more than the permitted limit, but that otherwise enforcing the maximum seating capacity "seems to have been neglected". "Why did number of tickets sold exceed number of berths? That is a problem."

"Let the issues raised in the petition be examined, as suggested by the solicitor general, at the highest level at the Railway Board and thereafter an affidavit be filed by the respondent giving details of the decisions which might be taken by the Railway Board," the court ordered.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said the matter was not taken in an adversarial manner and the Railways was bound to follow the law.

He said there was an "unprecedented" situation and assured the court that the issues raised in the PIL would be considered at the highest level.

The court said the PIL was not confined to the recent incident of stampede as it sought implementation of the existing legal provisions with respect to maximum number of passengers in a compartment and sale of platform tickets.

If the legal provisions were perhaps implemented adequately, such incidents of stampede could be avoided, it added.

The matter would come up on 26 March. —*PTI*

Yogi shreds Oppn for 'insulting' Sanatan Dharma

LUCKNOW, 19 FEB

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday asserted the Opposition's attempts to "malign the Maha Kumbh with false narratives" will not be tolerated, neither will any disrespect toward Sanatan Dharma.

This was as SP Chief Akhilesh Yadav supported West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's 'Mrityu Kumbh' remarks while questioning the Uttar Pradesh government's 'inadequate' arrangement of the Maha Kumbh. Yadav said that a large number of people from Bengal lost their lives and alleged that FIRs are not being registered in Uttar Pradesh. Yadav accused Yogi of taking "advantage of public's emotion" as he promoted Maha Kumbh saying that arrangement for 100 crore people have been made. "When he said that arrangements for 100 crore people have been made, people became more confident. When he invited celebrities, people were confident that the arrangements would be good. But that was not the case. The highest number of missing persons cases is in this Kumbh, highest number of deaths were reported in this Kumbh," he said. —*ANI*

Shankaracharya backs Didi's 'Mrityu Kumbh' remark

Shankaracharya Jagadguru Shankaracharya Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati Maharaj on Wednesday backed West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's 'Mrityu Kumbh' remark, saying that the religious event has been mismanaged. "There was a traffic jam of 300km, if this is not mismanagement then what is? People had to walk 25-30 km with their luggage. The water coming for bathing is mixed with sewage water and the scientists don't consider it fit for bathing. Yet you are forcing crores of people to bathe in it," he said. "Your job was to either stop the drains or divert them so that people could get pure water. You knew 12 years ago that Kumbh would come, then why did you not make any efforts in this regard?" he asked. —*ANI*

India victim of Pak's terror acts: New Delhi tells UNSC

UNITED NATIONS, 19 FEB

Parvathaneni Harish PHOTO: ANI

India has been a victim of terror acts perpetrated by Pakistan through Jaish-e-Mohammed and it is a "supreme irony" when the global epicentre of terrorism pats itself on the back claiming to fight against the scourge, Delhi's envoy told a UN Security Council meeting chaired by China.

India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish delivered a strongly-worded retort after Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammed Ishaq Dar made remarks about Jammu and Kashmir during an open debate on Tuesday.

"Pakistan is a global epicentre of terrorism harbouring more than 20 UN-listed terrorist entities and providing state support to cross-border terrorism," Harish said.

Several Pakistan-based terror entities and individuals are listed under the 1267 Al Qaida Sanctions Committee of the UN Security Council and are subject to an assets freeze, arms embargo and travel ban.

In the past, China, a fair-weather friend of Pakistan, has often put holds and blocks on proposals submitted by India and its partners like the US to blacklist Pakistan-based terrorists at the UN.

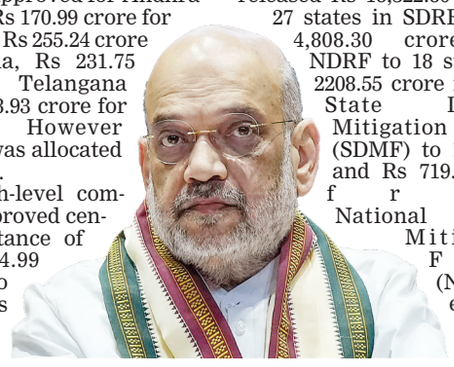
Harish asserted that there cannot be any justification for terrorism regardless of its form, type and motive.

"No political grievance can justify terrorism perpetrated against innocent civilians. This august body can make no distinction between good and bad terrorists," he said adding that Dar should take note of this and not further waste the time of the Council.

Underlining that Jammu and Kashmir have been, is, and will always be an integral and inalienable part of India, Harish said it is Pakistan in fact that is in "illegal occupation of parts of Jammu and Kashmir". —*PTI*

5 states get Rs 1.5K cr for disaster aid, Kerala excluded

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB



A committee headed by Union Home Minister Amit Shah has approved Rs 1554.99 crore of additional central assistance under the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) to five states affected by floods, flash floods, landslides and cyclonic storms during 2024.

Out of the total amount of Rs 1554.99 crore, Rs 608.08 crore has been approved for Andhra Pradesh, Rs 170.99 crore for Nagaland, Rs 255.24 crore for Odisha, Rs 231.75 crore for Telangana and Rs 288.93 crore for Tripura. However ,nothing was allocated for Kerala.

The high-level committee approved central assistance of Rs 1554.99 crore to five states from the NDRF, subject to an adjustment of 50 per cent of the opening balance for the year available in the SDRF.

This additional assistance is over and above the funds released by the Centre to the states in the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF), already placed at the disposal of the states.

During the financial year 2024-25, the Centre has released Rs 18,322.80 crore to 27 states in SDRF and Rs 4,808.30 crore from NDRF to 18 states, Rs 2208.55 crore from the State Disaster Mitigation Fund (SDMF) to 14 states and Rs 719.72 crore from National Disaster Mitigation Fund (NDMF) to eight states. —*PTI*

LANDSLIDE-HIT CHOORALMALA TO GET RS 35 CR BRIDGE

T'PURAM, 19 FEB

Kerala government approved a Rs 35 crore project to rebuild the Chooralmala bridge in Wayanad, which was destroyed in the devastating landslide last year.

The bridge will be rebuilt with enhanced security features from Chooralmala town to Mundakkai road.

The bridge that connected Meppadi with Mundakai and Attamala in the region is being rebuilt.

The bridge will be built at a level higher than the maximum water level recorded in the area during the disaster last year, the release said.

The length will be 267.95m and will be 107m above the river and 80m long on both banks. The Chooralmala bridge in Wayanad was washed away in the devastating landslide on July 30 last year that claimed over 200 lives. —*PTI*

Kerala man files complaint over rooster crowing at 3am

PATHANAMTHITTA, 19 FEB

In the quiet village of Pallickal in Kerala's Pathanamthitta, a battle was brewing--not over land or money, but over a rooster's morning routine. For Radhakrishna Kurup, an elderly person, a peaceful night's sleep had become impossible.

Reason: Every morning at 3 am, his neighbour's rooster would begin its relentless crowing, making it difficult for him to sleep. Kurup, unwell, had had enough. He filed a complaint at the Adoor Revenue Divisional Office (RDO) against his neighbour Anil Kumar's rooster.

Officials took the complaint seriously. The RDO launched an investigation, treating the rooster as the cause of the problem. Both Kurup and Kumar were called in to discuss the issue, and officials later inspected the site.

It was found that the neighbour kept his roosters on the upper floor of his house.

It was confirmed that the crowing was disturbing Kurup.

To resolve the matter, the RDO ordered the neighbour to move the poultry shed from the upper floor to the southern side of the property. —*PTI*

Nepali KIIT students fear returning

BHUBANESWAR, 19 FEB

BREAK THE SILENCE
OBSTRUCTION OF JUSTICE WILL NOT BE TOLERATED
NO SUBMISSION TO INSTITUTIONAL VIOLENCE
FIGHT FOR THE TRUTH

Around 1,000 Nepalese students were issued suspension notices PHOTO: PTI

Nepalese students on Wednesday expressed fear about returning to the Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT) campus here after events that took place following the alleged suicide of a 20-year-old student from the Himalayan nation.

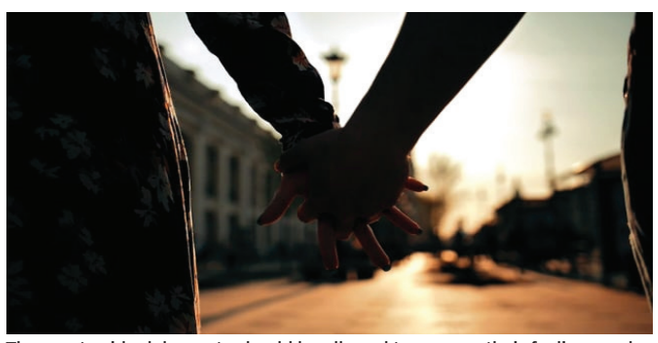
Around 1,000 Nepalese students studying at KIIT were issued suspension notices and asked to leave the campus immediately on Monday following protests after the body of a student, Prakriti Lamsal, was found hanging in her hostel room on Sunday.

However, following the intervention of the Centre, KIIT authorities tendered an apology and requested the students to return. But the harrowing experiences encountered by the Nepalese students, including being shunted out of the campus and left at Cuttack railway station and alleged incidents of being roughed up, have left them scarred. "We were forced to vacate the hostel without any fault of ours. The students from Nepal were agitated over the death of Prakriti as her previous pleadings with the authorities (over alleged blackmail by her former boyfriend) were ignored. She died by suicide out of frustration," Preeti, a student from Nepal, said. —*PTI*

'COMPASSION NEEDED'

Teen love not a crime, law must evolve: HC

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB



The court said adolescents should be allowed to express their feelings and engage in relationships without fear of criminalisation PHOTO: PTI

Delhi High Court has advocated for a compassionate approach prioritising "understanding" over "punishment" in criminal cases involving adolescent love. The court said the law should evolve to acknowledge such relationships that were consensual and free from coercion.

Affirming that consensual and respectful adolescent love was a natural part of human development, Justice Jasmeet Singh said adolescents should be allowed to express their feelings and engage in relationships without fear of criminalisation.

"I believe that societal and legal views on adolescent love should emphasise the rights of young individuals to engage in romantic relationships that are free from exploitation and abuse," said the court.

The judge said, "Love is a fundamental human experience and adolescents have the right to form emotional connections."

The court said the focus of the law should be on preventing exploitation and abuse rather than punishing love.

The high court therefore upheld a trial court judgement acquitting a man for the alleged offence of penetrative sexual assault under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act.

In December 2014, a complaint was lodged with the police by the girl's father that his minor daughter had not returned home from tuition. An apprehension was raised against the man since he was also missing from his house.

Investigation was conducted and the girl, who was around 16 years of age at the time of the incident, was brought back home, while a case was lodged against the man for allegedly sexually assaulting the minor.

The court, while upholding the man's acquittal and dismissing the state's plea against the trial court's decision, said the acquittal order was well reasoned and did not require any interference. —*PTI*

3 of same family found dead in Kolkata house

KOLKATA, 19 FEB

PHOTO: PTI

Two women and a teenage girl of the same family were found dead inside their house, while three other members were injured as their car rammed into a metro pillar in Kolkata on Wednesday, police said.

The three bodies were found in separate rooms on the third floor of the four-storey house in Tangra, with the bodies of the two women bearing wrist injuries, police said.

Police discovered the bodies after coming to know about the deaths from the husband of one of the deceased. He was among the three injured in the car accident.

Eyewitnesses claimed that the car directly rammed into the pillar. Police were investigating a claim by one of the three seriously injured in the car accident that the entire family planned to die by suicide together. A probe was also underway into claims by neighbours that around 10 people had visited the residence of the family twice on Tuesday.

"During preliminary investigation, we have come to know that the family was having some financial problem," police said. During preliminary investigation, it was found that the two women had slit their wrists after consuming some pills mixed in their food, another police officer said. —*PTI*

TO A DISTANT SHORE

157 False Killer Whales were stranded on an island in Tasmania, Australia, of which 47 died over the last 28-48 hours. The reason for the stranding, the first in 50 years, is not yet known. Due to the remote location it was difficult to get the equipment to the site in time and attempts to refloat them failed. Authorities are going to euthanise the 90 that survived. The endangered False Killer Whales are a type of oceanic dolphin, the last existent species of the *Pseudorca* genome

PHOTO: PTI

Mass deportation likely to shock the US economy

The US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency has said it is detaining and planning to deport 600 to 1,100 immigrants a day. That marks an increase from the average 282 immigration arrests that happened each day in September 2024 under the Biden administration. The current trend would place the Donald Trump administration on track to apprehend 25,000 immigrants in Trump's first month in office. This is about 3,00,000 on an annual basis.

The Trump administration is seeking USD 175 billion from Congress to use for the next four years on immigration enforcement, Axios reported on 11 February, 2025.

If Trump does make good on his promise of mass deportations, our research shows that removing millions of immigrants would be costly for everyone in the US, including American citizens and businesses.

One important factor is that mass deportations would weaken key industries in the US that rely on immigrant workers. Overall, immigrants without legal authorisation make up about 5 per cent of the total US workforce.

But that overall percentage doesn't reflect these immigrants' concentrated presence within various industries. Approximately half of US farmworkers are living in the country without legal authorisation, according to the US Department of Agriculture.

Some of these immigrant farmworkers are skilled supervisors who make decisions while others know how to use and maintain machines crucial to farm operations.

If those workers were to be suddenly removed from the country, Americans would see an increase in food costs as the domestic production of food could decrease, leading to higher costs and more imports.

National estimates of the restaurant and food preparation workforce indicate that between 10 per cent and 15 per cent of workers are immigrants living in the US illegally.

US President Donald Trump's mass deportation goals may remove a large portion of the US workforce, driving up food and housing prices

PHOTO: X

Past state-level immigration enforcement policies offer an idea of what could happen at the national level. For example, HB-56 a 2011 Alabama law, directed local police officers to investigate the immigration status of drivers stopped for speeding and prohibited landlords from renting properties to immigrants who do not have legal authorisation to work or live in the country.

That law prompted some Alabama-based immigrant workers to leave the state, costing an estimated USD 2.3 billion to USD 10.8 billion loss in annual gross domestic product to the state.

Nearly a quarter of the construction industry's workers are living without legal authorisation. Immigrant workers are particularly involved in home construction and specialise in such tasks that are highly skilled and not easily replaceable.

Fewer available workers would mean slower home construction, which in turn would make housing more expensive, further compounding existing problems. It would also slow commercial and public infrastructure construction.

Trump administration officials and other politicians have argued that deporting large numbers of immigrants would help the country save money, since fewer people will use federal and state funds by attending public schools or receiving temporary shelter.

Trump and his supporters also argue that deporting immigrants would mean more jobs for American workers. But there is compelling evidence to the contrary.

First, immigrants are filling labour shortages and doing jobs that many Americans don't want to do. Even if Americans were willing to do those jobs, there simply aren't enough Americans in the workforce to fill existing labour vacuums.

Second, for employers, having fewer workers in the country translates into higher wages, which in turn means less capital to adapt and grow.

Third, immigrants living without legal documentation in the US pay more than USD 96 billion in federal, state and local taxes per year and consume fewer public benefits than citizens.

In other words, people who are living and working in the US without legal authorisation are helping to pay, through taxes, the costs of caring for Americans.

The US would be unable to dodge the shocks and high costs that mass deportations would bring about. *—PTI*

SALAR

Why are M23 rebels laying siege to Congo cities

Rwanda-backed rebels have captured two key cities in Congo's mineral-rich east in less than a month after a major escalation in their yearslong fighting against overstretched and weakened Congolese forces.

With the support of thousands of troops from neighbouring Rwanda, the M23 rebels first took Goma last month before marching to Bukavu this weekend in an unprecedented advance since they took up arms more than a decade ago, further raising fears of regional warfare.

M23 is one of about 100 armed factions vying for control in eastern Congo. But unlike the others, they are mainly made up of ethnic Tutsis who failed to integrate into the Congolese army. The group says it is defending ethnic Tutsis and Congolese of Rwandan origin from discrimination, although critics say their Rwanda-backed campaign is a pretext for economic and political influence over eastern Congo.

M23 is being supported with troops and weapons from neighbouring Rwanda, according to US and UN experts. Rwanda's longtime President Paul Kagame accuses Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi of overlooking the concerns of Congo's ethnic Tutsis and ignoring previous peace agreements.

The M23's takeover of Goma in North Kivu province witnessed intense fighting with government and allied troops that left bodies lying in the streets and thousands of Congolese soldiers surrendering their arms.

But the rebels apparently had it much easier in Bukavu, 100kms south of Goma, where residents reported Congolese forces fleeing as M23 fighters marched into the city with little resistance.

The reasons for the timing of M23's "all-out assault" could be the realisation that they faced only limited resistance and were pushing against an open door, the International Crisis Group think tank said.

The international community has used mostly the same rhetoric since the latest M23 advance started on 26 January, with countries emphatic on dialogue and the rebels' withdrawal but stopping short of financial and diplomatic pressure on Kigali, as was the case in 2012, when M23 took Goma before pulling out.

A summit of leaders from eastern and southern Africa called for an immediate ceasefire but notably didn't call for the rebels to withdraw from Goma.

Observers have said the muted international pressure on Rwanda is partly because of the guilt over the failure to intervene to stop the 1994 genocide in Rwanda as well as the country's evolving stature under Kagame both in Africa and the West.

Murithi Mutiga, Africa director at the ICG, said it's African countries largely to blame for ignoring the warning signs of the conflict. He said the latest fighting was "a failure of African mediation." Unlike in 2012, when they withdrew from Goma in less than a week, the M23 has become more emboldened by Rwanda's support.

The conflict has regional complications with the involvement of Congo's southern and eastern neighbours, whose armies were invited by Tshisekedi when M23 resurfaced at the end of 2021.

Some of Congo's allies have suffered losses, including South Africa with 14 peacekeepers killed in the fighting for Goma. Authorities in Burundi also say their troops have been attacked by the rebels."The risk of a regional confrontation has never been higher," Mutiga said.

The concerns about an escalation beyond Congo also stem from the country's wars between 1996 and 2003, when Congo's neighbours and armed groups fought over access to metals and rare earth minerals such as copper, cobalt, lithium and gold. Up to 6 million people have died during the protracted conflict dubbed "Africa's world war."

Tshisekedi, who has said his country would fight back, has continued to demand action from the international community, which he believes has failed to pressure Rwanda.

Although Congo's government has said it is open to talks that M23 has also agreed to, authorities in Kinshasa say they must be held within the framework of past peace agreements and not M23's advance.

On the other hand, M23 is eyeing political power and says it's fighting corruption and bad governance in areas it now controls. The group has said it is open to "direct and sincere" dialogue to address the root causes of the conflict and enforce a ceasefire only if the Congolese military stops their campaign. *—PTI*

M23, a rebel group backed by Rwanda, has taken two cities in Congo

PHOTO: PTI

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

West Bank crackdown triggers biggest displacement in decades

By car and on foot, through muddy olive groves and snipers' sight lines, tens of thousands of Palestinians in recent weeks have fled Israeli military operations across the northern West Bank — the largest displacement in the occupied territory since the 1967 Mideast war.

After announcing a widespread crackdown against West Bank militants on 21 January — just two days after its ceasefire deal with Hamas in Gaza — Israeli forces descended on the restive city of Jenin, as they have dozens of times since 7 October, 2023.

But unlike past operations, Israeli forces then pushed deeper and more forcefully into several other nearby towns, including Tulkarem, Far'a and Nur Shams, scattering families and stirring bitter memories of the 1948 war over Israel's creation.

During that war, 7,00,000 Palestinians fled or were forced from their homes in what is now Israel. That Nakba, or "catastrophe," as Palestinians call it, gave rise to the crowded West Bank towns now under assault and still known as refugee camps.

"This is our nakba," said Abed Sabagh, 53, who bundled his seven children into the car on 9 February as sound bombs blared in Nur Shams camp, where he was born to parents who fled the 1948 war.

Humanitarian officials say they haven't seen such displacement in the West Bank since the 1967 Mideast war, when Israel captured the territory west of the Jordan River, along with east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, displacing another 3,00,000 Palestinians.

"This is unprecedented. When you add to this the destruction of infrastructure, we're reaching a point where the camps are becoming uninhabitable," said Roland Friedrich, director of West Bank affairs for the UN Palestinian refugee agency. More than 40,100 Palestinians have fled their homes in the ongoing military operation, according to the agency.

President Donald Trump's plan for the mass transfer of Palestinians out of Gaza has emboldened Israel's far-right to renew calls for annexation of the West Bank.

"The idea of cleansing' the land of Palestinians is more popular today than ever before," said Yagil Levy, head of the Institute for the Study of Civil-Military Relations at Britain's Open University.

The Israeli army denies issuing evacuation orders in the West Bank. It said troops secure passages for those wanting to leave on their own accord.

More than 40,100 Palestinians have fled their homes in the West Bank. Officials say the displacement is one of the largest since the 1967 Mideast war

PHOTO: PTI

Over a dozen displaced Palestinians said they did not flee their homes out of fear, but on the orders of Israeli security forces. Associated Press journalists in the Nur Shams camp also heard Israeli soldiers shouting through mosque megaphones, ordering people to leave.

Some displaced families said soldiers were polite, knocking on doors and assuring them they could return when the army left. Others said they were ruthless, ransacking rooms, waving rifles and hustling residents out of their homes.

"I was sobbing, asking them, why do you want me to leave my house?' My baby is upstairs, just let me get my baby please,'" Ayat Abdullah, 30, recalled. "They gave us seven minutes. I brought my children, thank God. Nothing else."

Told to make their own way, Abdullah trudged 10kms on a path lighted only by the glow from her phone as rain turned the ground to mud. She said she clutched her children tight, braving possible snipers that had killed a 23-year-old pregnant woman just hours earlier.

Her 5-year-old son, Nidal, interrupted her story, pursing his lips together to make a loud buzzing sound. "You're right, my love," she replied. "That's the sound the drones made when we left home."

In the nearby town of Anabta, volunteers moved in and out of mosques and government buildings that have become makeshift shelters — delivering donated blankets, serving bitter coffee, distributing boiled eggs for breakfast and whipping up vats of rice and chicken for dinner.

Residents have opened their homes to families fleeing Nur Shams and Tulkarem. "This is our duty in the current situation," said Thabet A'mar, the mayor of Anabta. He stressed that it should not be mistaken for anything more. "We insist that their displacement is temporary."

When the invasion started on 2 February, Israeli bulldozers ruptured underground pipes. Taps ran dry. Sewage gushed. Internet service was shut off. Schools closed. Food supplies dwindled. Explosions echoed.

"They are doing everything they can to push us out," Ahmad Sobuh said. According to the UN agency for refugees, has Israel has demolished hundreds of homes across the four camps this year.

The first thing Doha Abu Dgehish noticed about her family's home 10 days after Israeli troops forced them to leave was the smell. She found rotten food and toilets piled with excrement. Pages of the Quran had been defaced with graphic drawings. Israeli forces had apparently used explosives to blow every door off its hinges, even though none had been locked.

Rama, her 11-year-old daughter with Down syndrome, screamed upon finding her doll's skirt torn and its face covered with more graphic drawings. The mess was emblematic of the emotional whiplash of return. No one knows when they'll have to flee again.

"It's like they want us to feel that we're never safe," Abu Dgehish said. "That we have no control." *—PTI*

Wave of winter storms target East Coast in US

NORFOLK, 19 FEB

The latest in a long line of winter storms is taking direct aim at the East Coast, threatening to dump heavy snow and some ice in several states. A storm that dropped snow in the Midwest was spreading across the Tennessee and Ohio Valleys on Wednesday, bringing more misery to some places just starting to clean up from deadly weekend floods. Up to 25 centimetres of snow was possible along the Atlantic Coast in Virginia and significant ice accumulations were forecast in eastern North Carolina, the National Weather Service said. Elsewhere, a polar vortex took over from Montana to southern Texas. Bismarck, North Dakota, hit minus 39.4 degrees C on early Tuesday. *—PTI*

Japan's Kishida attacker gets 10 yrs in prison

TOKYO, 19 FEB

A Japanese court on Wednesday convicted a man who threw a homemade pipe bomb at Japan's former Prime Minister Fumio Kishida at a 2023 campaign event, sentencing him to 10 years in prison, court officials said. Ryuji Kimura, 25, was found guilty of attempted murder in the 15 April, 2023 attack on Kishida in the western city of Wakayama, as well as four other crimes including violations of laws on explosives and other weapons. The Wakayama District Court said Kimura was aware of the potential for a fatality in his attack, reported Kyodo News. The ruling said the attack at an election campaign event was a serious challenge to democracy and posed a significant danger to many people, Kyodo said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

A$AP Rocky found not guilty in gun assault trial

LOS ANGELES, 19 FEB

The musician A$AP Rocky has been found not guilty of shooting a former friend after an altercation in Hollywood in 2021, sparing him from a potentially decades-long prison sentence. A Los Angeles jury on Tuesday acquitted him of two felony counts of assault with a semiautomatic firearm. After the verdict was read, the 36-year-old hip-hop star dove into the gallery to hug his longtime partner, Rihanna, and expressed his gratitude to the jurors as they left the courtroom. "Thank y'all for saving my life," he said. The verdict follows a more than two week trial during which the alleged victim, whose stage name is A$AP Relli, testified that Rocky fired two shots from a handgun at him, grazing his knuckles. *—Agencies*

UK's inflation spikes to 3%, hits 10-month high

LONDON, 19 FEB

Inflation in the UK rose to a 10-month high in January, official figures showed on Wednesday, an increase that will likely diminish expectations of rapid interest rate reductions from the Bank of England. The Office for National Statistics said inflation, as measured by the consumer prices index, rose to 3 per cent in the year to January, up from the equivalent 2.5 per cent rate the month before. The spike, which took inflation further above the bank's target of 2 per cent, was largely due to increases in airfares, food costs and private school fees in the wake of the new Labour government's decision to impose a sales tax. Economists had anticipated 2.8 per cent, but the spike has come as a surprise and will likely cause concern among rate-setters at the central bank worried about tepid economic growth. *—PTI*

Trump blames Ukraine over war with Russia

Rejects complaints of keeping Kyiv out of talks

WASHIKNGTON DC, 19 FEB

United States President Donald Trump has said he will "probably" meet Russian President Vladimir Putin this month, while launching a broadside effectively accusing Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of being to blame for Moscow's invasion.

Addressing reporters after US and Russian officials met for their first round of talks in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday, Trump dismissed complaints that Kyiv had been denied a seat at negotiations to bring an end to Russia's war in Ukraine.

"I think I have the power to end this war, and I think it's going very well. But today, I heard, 'Oh, well, we weren't invited.' Well, you've been there for three years. You should have ended it...," Trump said at a news conference at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Florida.

"You should have never started it. You could have made a deal. I could have made a deal for Ukraine."

Trump said that he was "much more confident" of reaching an agreement following the talks in Riyadh led by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

"They were very good. Russia wants to do something, they want to stop the savage barbarism," he said.

Asked if his administration would support Russia's calls for elections in Ukraine as part of any peace deal, Trump claimed without evidence that Zelenskyy had an approval rating of just 4 percent and noted that the country's elections had been suspended under martial law.

In an opinion poll by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology in December, 52 percent of respondents said they trusted Zelenskyy, down 12 percentage points from February. *—Agencies*

Panama detains 300 US deportees

PANAMA CITY, 19 FEB

Panama is detaining in a hotel nearly 300 people from various countries deported under US President Donald Trump, not allowing them to leave while waiting for international authorities to organise a return to their countries.

More than 40 per cent of the migrants, authorities say, will not voluntarily return to their homelands. Migrants in the hotel rooms held messages to the windows reading "Help" and "We are not save (sic) in our country."

The migrants hail from 10 mostly Asian countries, such as Iran, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Afghanistan, China and others. The US has difficulty deporting directly to some of those countries so Panama is being used as a stopover. *—PTI*

Netanyahu picks aide with Trump ties for truce talks

JERUSALEM, 19 FEB

An Israeli official said that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has appointed a close confidant to lead negotiations for the second stage of the ceasefire with Hamas.

The US-born Ron Dermer is a Cabinet minister who's widely seen as Netanyahu's closest adviser.

He previously served as Israel's ambassador to the US and is a former Republican activist with strong ties to the Trump White House.

Israel and Hamas have yet to negotiate a second and more difficult phase of the ceasefire, and the first ends in early March.

Palestinians and Arab countries have universally rejected US President Donald Trump's proposal to remove the Palestinian population from Gaza and take over the territory.

Since the war in Gaza was sparked by Hamas' attack on 7 October, 2023, more than 50,000 people have died in Gaza and Lebanon and nearly 70 per cent of the buildings in Gaza have been devastated, according to health ministries in Gaza and Lebanon. *— PTI*

WHITE HOUSE SHARES ASMR VIDEO OF SHACKLED DEPORTEES

PHOTO: X/@WHITEHOUSE

WASHINGTON, 19 FEB

White House shared a clip on X titled "ASMR: Illegal Alien Deportation" showing deportees being handcuffed and chained around their legs and waist by the US cops before they board flights to their respective countries. The post features various clips of officers preparing restraints, chaining deportees, detainees walking in chains, and individuals boarding a plane.

None of the deportees' faces are shown in the footage.

An officer is seen securing a man in shackles before he boards a deportation flight in the 42-seconds clip.

The video, which has since gone viral, was also retweeted by Tesla CEO Elon Musk with the caption, "Haha wow".

The netizens denounced Musk's reaction calling it "disgusting" and "dehumanising." "This is disgusting. The fact that you think this is funny speaks volumes," said a user on X.

"You are pathetic, @elonmusk. A small man who laughs at a video of undocumented immigrants in shackles boarding a plan for being deported," wrote another. *—Agencies*

Kennedy to review vaccine schedule

To earn the votes to become the nation's top health official, Robert F Kennedy Jr had made a promise to a US senator: He would not change the nation's current vaccination schedule. But on Tuesday, he said he vowed to investigate the vaccine schedule that prevents measles, polio and other dangerous diseases. *—PTI*

US halts support for child immigrants

The Trump administration on Tuesday stopped support for legal representation in immigration court for children who enter the US alone, a setback for those fighting deportation and cannot afford a lawyer. The Acacia Center for Justice says it serves 26,000 migrant children. The Interior Department gave no explanation for the order. *—PTI*

Border arrests down by 39% in January

Arrests for illegal border crossings from Mexico plummeted by 39 per cent in January, authorities said on Tuesday, an early gauge of President Trump's immigration crackdown. The Border Patrol made 21,593 arrests during the month, down from 47,316 in December and the lowest since May 2020, said US Border Protection officials. *—PTI*

Judge refuses to stall DOGE operations

US District Judge Tanya Chutkan on Tuesday declined to block millionaire Elon Musk-led Department of Government Efficiency from accessing government data or participating in worker layoffs. Meanwhile, DOGE took lists of the military's probationary employees from the Pentagon, US officials said. *—PTI*

Trump wants to fire Biden era attorneys

Trump has directed the Justice Department to fire all remaining Biden-era US attorneys, claiming the department has been politicised. "We must 'clean house' IMMEDIATELY, and restore confidence. America's Golden Age must have a fair Justice System - THAT BEGINS TODAY," Trump said in a post on Truth Social. *—Agencies*

B'deshi Islamists block women's football match

RANGPUR, 19 FEB

- The Islami Andolan Bangladesh announced the rally shortly before the game was scheduled to begin.
- They claimed that organising the match was against their religious values
- Local police asked the women to return home for their safety

According to a report by the BBC a women's football match was cancelled in Rangpur, Bangladesh after Islamist forces protested against the event. This was the third women's football game to be canceled in northern Bangladesh in less than two weeks.

The Islami Andolan Bangladesh announced the rally shortly before the game was scheduled to begin. They claimed that the match was against their religious values.

"If women want to play football, they should cover their entire body, and they can play only in front of female spectators. Men cannot watch them play," Maulana Ashraf Ali, the leader of the Islami Andolan Bangladesh in the Taraganj area of Rangpur said.

Local police asked the women to return home for their safety.

Asha Roy, 17, one of the players said, "I was frustrated and frightened. We have never faced such a situ-ation before."

The coach, Nurul Islam, echoed her anguish. "I have taken the team to many tournaments for the past seven years, but it's the first time we have faced a situation like this," he said.

The political instability has allowed a resurgence of Islamic groups in the country, including revoking a ban on the country's largest Islamist party, Jamaat-e-Islami.

Last week, a group of Islamic students vandalised a book stall in Dakha display a book feminist author Taslima Nasrin. Similarly, events led by women actors have been cancelled recently. *—Agencies*

GUNMEN IN PAK KILL 7 PUNJABI TRAVELLERS

QUETTA, 19 FEB

Gunmen in southwest Pakistan shot seven bus passengers dead after identifying them as being from another region, a government official said Wednesday.

Attackers late on Tuesday burst the tires of a bus that was traveling on a highway through Balochistan, close to the provincial border with Punjab, said Saadat Hussain, a senior government official in the area.

Gunmen boarded the bus and demanded to see the identity cards of passengers, after which Punjabis were taken off the bus.

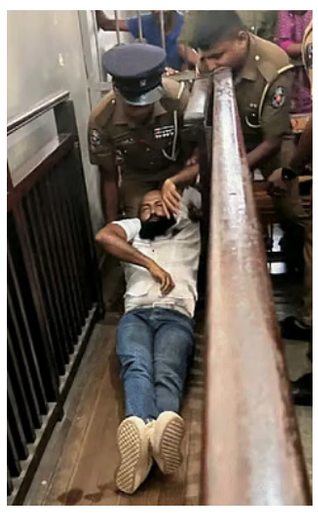
"The passengers belonging to Punjab province... were taken off by the terrorists and killed," Hussain told AFP.

"Later they were lined up and shot dead."

No one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Security forces have been battling sectarian, ethnic and separatist violence for decades in the impoverished but mineral-rich Balochistan province, which borders Afghanistan and Iran. *—Agencies*

Noted criminal shot at Colombo court



Ganemulle Sanjiwa **Photo: X**

COLOMBO, 19 FEB

A noted underworld figure died after he was shot on Wednesday morning within a court premises, sending shock waves through the judicial district of Hulftsdorp, a suburb of Colombo.

Noted criminal suspect Ganemulle Sanjiwa died after admission to the hospital, said National Hospital director Dr Rukshan Bellana.

Sanjiwa was brought for a hearing to the main magistrate's court from the prison at the southern town of Boossa when he was shot at by a gunman, who was present at the hearing disguised as a lawyer, police said.

The revolver used for the murder was discovered within the court premises as a manhunt was launched to nab the assassin, police added.

The victim was rushed to the hospital by the police's special task force that had earlier provided security escort to the prison van carrying him to the court.

However, he died soon after admission to the general hospital, the doctor said. The gunman fled the scene, police added.

Sanjiwa, who had fled the country after being hunted for criminal activities, was arrested at the airport upon his return from Nepal in September 2023.

Since then, he had been held under detention pending a number of cases against him. *—PTI*

UK tightens law after knife attack on Indian-origin boy

LONDON, 19 FEB

The UK government on Wednesday announced stricter rules for online retailers selling knives, along with tougher penalties for failing to enforce them, as part of a new crackdown named in memory of an Indian-origin boy killed in a stabbing attack.

Ronan's Law will require retailers to report suspicious and bulk purchases of knives on their platforms to police, with tougher sentences for selling knives to under 18s.

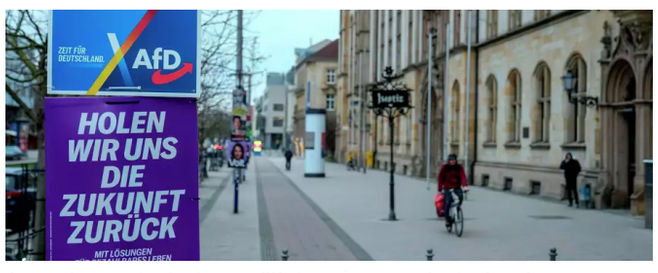
Ronan Kanda, 16, was attacked near his home in Wolverhampton in the West Midlands region of England in July 2022 and died at the scene after being stabbed twice.

His mother Pooja Kanda has since been campaigning for more stringent measures. *—PTI*

GROWING INTOLERANCE

German city sees spurt in racism

MAGDEBURG, 19 FEB



An election poster that reads 'It's time for a country that is still a home country' on display at in Magdeburg **PHOTO: X**

In the aftermath of a deadly attack at a Christmas market in Magdeburg late last year, migrants who have settled in the German city say they have experienced a sharp increase in racism and anti-immigration sentiments.

"We are the same as you," Eritrean immigrant Haben Gebregergish, one of the victims, said earlier this month. "We are not different. Just like you, we have feelings. Sometimes we are sad, sometimes we are happy, just like everyone else."

The Christmas market violence was one of five high-profile attacks committed by immigrants in the past nine months that have made migration a key issue as the country heads toward an early election on Sunday. The suspect, a Saudi doctor, drove into the holiday market teeming with shoppers and left five women and a 9-year-old boy dead and 200 people injured.

The suspect arrived in Germany in 2006 and had received permanent residency, and authorities say the suspect does not fit the usual profile of perpetrators of extremist attacks. He is being held in custody as authorities investigate him.

Just one day after the 20 December violence, there was a large right-wing demonstration in Magdeburg, and verbal and physical attacks on migrants have increased significantly in the city since then, says the German-Syrian Cultural Association in Magdeburg. *—PTI*

SUCHIR BALAJI'S MOTHER URGES FOR FBI PROBE

CALIFORNIA, 19 FEB

After the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) and the San Francisco Police Department Friday concluded OpenAI whistleblower-Suchir Balaji's death as suicide. Balaji's mother Poornima Ramarao said they are looking to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to investigate the case.

According to OCME's forensic analysis found that there were no other injuries or bruises on Suchir's body, there were no signs of forced entry, and that he was alone at the time of his death.

Suchir Balaji, who was a researcher at OpenAI, quit his job and spoke out about the company's alleged copyright law violations. His parents believe that his killing was in retaliation. *—Agencies*

Pope Francis suffers from pneumonia in both lungs

ROME, 19 FEB

Pope Francis **PHOTO: FB**

Pope Francis has developed pneumonia in both lungs, the Vatican said on Tuesday, after new tests showed a further complication in the condition of the 88-year-old.

The Vatican said Francis' respiratory infection also involves asthmatic bronchitis, which requires the use of cortisone antibiotic treatment. "Laboratory tests, chest X-ray and the Holy Father's clinical condition continue to present a complex picture," the Vatican said.

Nevertheless the pope is in good spirits and is grateful for the prayers for his recovery, Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said in a late update.

Francis was admitted to Rome's Gemelli hospital in a "fair" condition on Friday after a weeklong bout of bronchitis worsened. On Monday, medical personnel determined that he was suffering from a polymicrobial respiratory tract infection, meaning a mix of viruses, bacteria and possibly other organisms had colonized his respiratory tract.

"The follow-up chest CT scan to which the Holy Father underwent this afternoon ... demonstrated the onset of bilateral pneumonia, which required additional drug therapy," Bruni said.

Bronchitis can lead to pneumonia. Treatment varies by severity. *—PTI*

HAL and DIAT forge partnership for aerospace research

BENGALURU, 19 FEB

Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) on Wednesday said its nodal training institute, HAL Management Acad-emy (HMA) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Defence Institute of Advanced Technology (DIAT) for collaboration in bridging the gap between industry and academia. The MoU with Pune based DIAT, an esteemed institution under DRDO, also aims at fostering cutting-edge research and driving tech-nological advancements in the aerospace sector. Under this partnership, HAL exec-utives will have the oppor-tunity to pursue master's and Ph D programmes at DIAT, participate in special-ised capsule modules on emerging technologies and engage in faculty and stu-dent exchange pro-grammes, the company said in a re-lease. —*PTI*

RIL's Campa, Noon Minutes unite for e-commerce in UAE

DUBAI/BENGALURU, 19 FEB

Reliance Consumer goods Limited's beverage brand, Campa, and "noon Minutes" have established an e-com-merce agreement that would enable quick delivery of Campa goods to clients in the United Arab Emirates, as per a release. This strategic collaboration enhances accessibility for consumers while strengthening noon Minutes' beverage portfolio. Following its successful debut at Gulfood 2025, Campa Cola is now available exclusively through noon Minutes across the UAE, ensuring seamless online availability with deliv-ery in minutes, the company said in release. As demand for convenience grows, this partnership helps Campa scale rapidly in the region using noon's advanced logistics and digi-tal reach, the release added. Orders will be delivered in 15 minutes or less across the UAE, ensuring a fast and seamless shopping experi-ence. —*ANI*

Google to pay Italy $340M to settle tax evasion charges

MILAN, 19 FEB

Italian prosecutors said on Wednesday that they will seek to drop a tax evasion investigation against Google after the tech giant agreed to pay a 326M Euro (USD 340M) settlement. Milan prosecutors had opened an investigation against Google for failure to pay taxes on earnings in Italy from 2015 to 2019. The investigation focused on revenues from the sale of advertising, and cited the presence of serv-ers and other infrastructure in Italy. Google acknowl-edged the settlement in statement, saying it resolves "a tax audit ... without litiga-tion." Tech giant Google previously paid over USD 1B to French authorities to set-tle a dispute over allega-tions of tax fraud. —*PTI*

Raymond Group reports cyber security breach

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

The real estate wing of Raymond Group on Wednesday reported a cyber security incident at the company that impacted some of its IT assets. In a regulatory filing, Raymond Ltd informed that "a cyber security incident has occurred at the company and it has impacted some of the IT assets which have been isolated". The incident has not impacted our core systems and operations, it added. "None of our cus-tomer operations and store operations have been affect-ed and the same are up and running normally," the com-pany said. With the incep-tion in 1925, Raymond Group has been a pioneer and leader in fabric manu-facturing and then forayed in other sectors such as engineering business and real estate. —*PTI*

Tesla may debut in India by April, EVs likely from ₹21L

US auto major has yet to commit to manufacturing in India

MUMBAI/
NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

Tesla CEO Elon Musk is likely to launch the company's retail operations in India by April 2025, starting with vehicle imports from its Berlin plant, according to sources.

The electric vehicle giant has identified showroom loca-tions in Mumbai's Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC) and Aerocity in New Delhi, mov-ing closer to its long-anticipat-ed entry into the Indian mar-ket. Tesla is also planning to introduce an EV priced under $25,000 (approximately Rs 21 lakh) for Indian consumers, the report added.

While Tesla has yet to com-mit to manufacturing in India, it plans to ramp up component sourcing from Indian OEM suppliers.

Tesla has secured lease agreements for 5,000-square-foot showroom spaces in Aerocity, near New Delhi's international airport, and Mumbai's business hub BKC.

Elon Musk-owned Tesla has secured lease agreements for showroom spaces in Aerocity near New Delhi's international airport and Mumbai's business hub BKC *PHOTO: X*

However, the company has not yet finalised opening dates for the outlets, and these loca-tions will be for sales, not ser-vice centres, the report added.

Tesla has been scouting for showroom spaces in India since late last year, after shelving its initial entry plans in 2022. The move follows Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent meeting with Elon Musk in the United States, where they discussed space, mobility, and technology collaborations.

In a sign of its growing inter-est in the Indian market, Tesla has also posted job listings for 13 mid-level roles in the country, including store and cus-tomer relationship managers.

> The move follows Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent meeting with Elon Musk in the United States, where they discussed space, mobility, and technology collaborations

Musk has previously criti-cised India's high import tar-iffs on EVs, which can reach up to 100 per cent. Tesla has lobbied for reduced duties, but domestic automakers have opposed such relaxations, cit-ing concerns over competi-tion.

Tesla's entry into India marks a major development in the country's electric vehicle sector, as the government con-tinues to push for greater adoption of clean energy transportation —*Agencies*

TCS, INFOSYS TANK

Markets end marginally lower in volatile trade

MUMBAI, 19 FEB

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended marginally lower in a volatile trade on Wednesday dragged by blue-chip IT stocks. The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex dipped 28.21 points or 0.04 per cent to settle at 75,939.18. Intra-day, it hit a high of 76,338.58 and a low of 75,581.38, gyrating 757.2 points. The NSE Nifty skidded 12.40 points or 0.05 per cent to 22,932.90.

From the Sensex pack, Tata Consultancy Services and Infosys fell over 2 per cent each. Hindustan Unilever, Bharti Airtel, Sun Pharma, Power Grid, Bajaj Finserv, HCL Tech, Mahindra & Mahindra and Tech Mahindra were also among the laggards. Among the gainers, Zomato jumped nearly 5 per cent. Larsen & Toubro, Axis Bank, ICICI Bank, IndusInd Bank and Kotak Mahindra Bank were also among the gainers.

PHOTO: PTI

In Asian markets, Seoul and Shanghai settled in the posi-tive territory while Tokyo and Hong Kong ended lower. European markets were trad-ing mostly lower.

Foreign Institutional Inves-tors turned buyers on Tues-day after unabated selling. They bought equities worth Rs 4,786.56 crore, according to exchange data. The BSE small-cap gauge jumped 2.41 per cent and midcap index climbed 1.30 per cent.

After a day's breather, the Sensex ended 29.47 points or 0.04 per cent lower at 75,967.39 on Tuesday. The Nifty dipped 14.20 points or 0.06 per cent to settle at 22,945.30. —*ANI*

ANCHORED BY RURAL ECONOMY

SBI research estimates GDP growth for current fiscal at 6.3%

KOLKATA, 19 FEB

The State Bank of India (SBI), in its research, has estimated GDP growth during the cur-rent financial year (2024-25) to be 6.3 per cent, assuming that the NSO does not make major revisions to the erstwhile first and second quarter estimates.

The report said that leverag-ing 36 high-frequency indica-tors, the estimated GDP growth for the third quarter of the current financial year should be between 6.2 per cent and 6.3 per cent.

According to the National Statistics Office (NSO), the real and nominal GDP growth rates for 2024-25 are projected at 6.4 per cent and 9.7 per cent, respectively.

The report said that a healthy rural economy is rein-forcing stability and sustains momentum in other sectors.

The slowdown in the current household inflation expecta-

PHOTO: PTI

tions encourages higher dis-cretionary spending and drives demand-led growth, the report said.

Capital expenditure is show-ing improvement in the third quarter of the current finan-cial year, the report said.

The slowdown in the third quarter of the calendar year 2024 due to geopolitical devel-opments and supply chain dis-ruptions impacted not only India but other countries also.

Despite that, India continued to remain one of the fast-est-growing economies, according to the SBI report.

A recent IMF global growth forecast has estimated India's growth to be at 6.5 per cent for both the current and subse-quent fiscal on the back of robust domestic demand and policy interventions by the government. —*PTI*

US tariffs to have limited impact on India: S&P

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

S&P Global Ratings on Wednesday said the impact of the US reciprocal tariff will be limited on India as the econo-my is domestically oriented with less reliance on exports.

YeeFarn Phua, Director, Sovereigns and International Public Finance Ratings, Asia-Pacific S&P Global also said India will clock a 6.7-6.8 per cent GDP growth over the next two years.

He said the fiscal 2025-26 bud-get will boost growth for the next few years, largely by domestic demand through tax cuts for households and GDP growth is now normalising to a more "sustainable level".

Tariff may impact India's GDP between 0.1-0.6%: Goldman Sachs

Meanwhile, Trump's tariff may impact India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in between 0.1 to 0.6 according to a report by Goldman Sachs.

The report which analyses the impact of US tariffs on India's GDP under coun-

PHOTO: PTI

try-level reciprocity, prod-uct-level reciprocity says, "India's domestic activity exposure to US final demand would be roughly twice as high (4.0 per cent of GDP) given exposure to the US via exports to other countries, and would likely result in a poten-tial domestic GDP growth impact of 0.1-0.6pp."

If Trump administration chooses to increase the tariff on all US imports by the aver-age tariff differential between a particular country and the US. Under this scenario, the average US effective tariff rates on Indian imports would increase by 6.5 percentage points —*PTI/ANI*

Ola Electric renegotiates contracts, sales unaffected

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

Ola Electric, India's largest electric scooter maker, on Wednesday announced it is renego-tiating contracts with its vehicle registration agencies- a period during which actual sales will not be impact-ed but the registration numbers showing on the government's VAHAN portal may see a temporary blip. In a stock exchange filing, Ola said it is discussing revising existing agree-ments with Rosmerta Digital Services Private Ltd and Shimnit India Private Ltd as part of a sales overhaul. This will "temporarily affect" reg-istration numbers reflecting on the VAHAN portal in February. According to the company's exchange filing, the negotiations aim to reduce costs and modi-fy the registration pro-cess. Ola Electric works with the registration agencies as it does not operate through auto-mobile dealerships but only through compa-ny-owned stores as part of a direct-to-con-sumer strategy. The two agencies, Rosmerta Digital Services and Shimnit India handle vehicle registration processes for Ola Electric across various regions. —*PTI*

Infy cuts Q3 performance bonus ahead of annual hikes

BENGALURU, 19 FEB

IT services giant Infosys has announced an average performance bonus pay out of 80 per cent for eligible employees in the third quarter ending December, ahead of its annual pay hikes expected by March-end, sources told ET.

The bonus pay out saw a decline of up to 10 per cent points compared to the pre-vious quarter for employ-ees in the delivery and sales divisions, which constitute the majority of Infosys' 323,000-strong workforce. In Q2, employees had received around 85 per cent of their variable pay.

"In line with our organisa-tional goals on building a high-performance work cul-ture, we have continued to drive performance differen-tiation while closing bonus

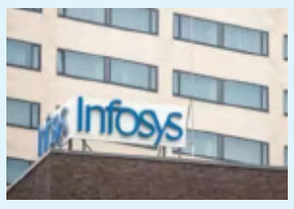


PHOTO: PTI

pay-outs," Infosys said in an internal circular.

According to employees, payouts varied based on performance ratings—100 per cent for 'outstanding,' 85 per cent for 'commend-able,' and 70 per cent for those who 'met expecta-tions' at Job Level 5 & 6 (spanning team leaders to senior managers).

Meanwhile, Tata Consultancy Services is set to roll out salary hikes for FY25 in March, with incre-ments ranging between 4 and 8 per cent. —*Agencies*

Tata Steel shares in focus as UK approves new electric furnace

MUMBAI, 19 FEB

Shares of Tata Steel are set to be in focus after its UK arm secured local council approval to set up an Electric Arc Furnace (EAF) for greener steelmaking at its Port Talbot facility in South Wales.

The £1.25 billion invest-ment, backed by £500 million from the UK government, aims to cut on-site CO emis-sions by 90 per cent and pre-serve 5,000 jobs at Tata Steel UK. The shift marks a major step toward sustainable steel production, replacing ageing blast furnaces with electric furnaces that pri-marily use scrap steel instead of imported iron ore and coal.

Tata Steel UK CEO Rajesh

PHOTO: PTI

Nair called the approval a "significant milestone," add-ing that large-scale work at the site would begin this summer, with the EAF expected to be operational by the end of 2027.

Under its restructuring plan announced in 2023, Tata Steel is transitioning to low-emission steel produc-tion at Port Talbot, which will, however, result in 2,800 job losses. The company has promised a "generous-ever support package" for affect-ed employees, including vol-untary redundancy schemes and re-skilling opportuni-ties.

Tata Steel, the UK's largest steelmaker, operates manu-facturing and distribution sites across Wales, England, Northern Ireland and parts of Europe. It recently shut down its last two blast fur-naces at Port Talbot, paving the way for its green transi-tion. —*Agencies*

Salaries to rise 9.2% amid global uncertainty: Study

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

Salaries in India are set to rise by an average 9.2 per cent in 2025 as compared to 9.3 per cent last year amid global uncertainty and softening growth, global professional services firm Aon plc said.

According to the firm's Annual Salary Increase and Turnover Survey 2024-25, India is poised for a stable growth story, and salary increments in the country are expected to stabilise in 2025.

The study that analysed data from over 1,400 companies across 45 industries noted that attrition seems to be easing down for India Inc. There has been a trend of declining salary increments since 2022, when companies provided an average 10.6 per cent salary increase influ-enced by the Great Resignation.

The overall attrition rate

PHOTO: PTI

declined to 17.7 per cent in 2024 from 18.7 per cent in 2023 and 21.4 per cent in 2022, indi-cating the availability of a larger talent pool post the Great Resignation. Pay hikes are projected to vary across industries with engineering design services and auto/vehicle manufactur-ing budgeting for the highest salary increases of 10.2 per cent, followed by non-banking financial companies at 10 per cent, the study said. The study, now in its 30th year, is one of the largest and most comprehensive rewards studies in India. —*PTI*

STAY ALERT, STAY SAFE

WHAT IS THE CALL MERGING SCAM?

Authorities in India have warned about a new scam where fraudsters manipulate users into merging calls and unknowingly revealing their One-Time Passwords (OTPs). This trick allows scammers to complete unauthorised transactions and steal money

HOW THE SCAM WORKS

- Scammer calls, claiming to have your number from a friend
- They ask you to merge a call with the 'friend' (another scammer)
- You unknowingly merge the call with a real OTP verifica-tion call from your bank
- Scammers trick you into sharing the OTP and steal your money

PHOTO: FREEPIK

HOW TO STAY SAFE

- Never merge calls with unknown num-bers
- Verify caller identity before sharing any information
- Report suspicious OTPs to 1930 and your bank immedi-ately

SCAM STATISTICS IN INDIA

54% know someone who has been scammed

- 1 in 3 people in India has fallen victim to real-time payment scams
- 60% have received scam messages
- Cases of people loosing over Rs 8 lakh doubled in 2024

PHOTO: PTI

Ganguly a top choice for brand endorsements

NEW DELHI, 19 FEB

Former India captain Sourav Ganguly remains a sought-after figure in the world of endorsements with more than 40 brands currently associated with him. The 52-year-old promotes a wide range of brands including banking, real estate, automobiles, consumer goods and fantasy sports. There is a strong reason why Ganguly continues to attract a plethora of commercial partners, said a member of his management team. His involvement in sports extends beyond cricket, as he co-owns the Kolkata team in the Indian Racing Festival and has ties with the Delhi Capitals where he works both with IPL and WPL franchise. He has also aligned with the growing EV sector, promoting sustainable mobility *—PTI*

Kohli, Nadal, LeBron join E1 powerboat league

MUMBAI, 19 FEB

Star India batter Virat Kohli, tennis legend Rafael Nadal, and basketball icon LeBron James are among the prominent team owners of the UIM E1 World Championship, the world's first all-electric powerboating competition. The event will feature a star-studded lineup of team owners from across sports, music, and entertainment, including Kohli, whose Team Blue Rising will compete in the global series. Besides Kohli, the championship boasts of high-profile team owners such as basketball legend James (Team AlUla), music producer and DJ Steve Aoki (Aoki Racing Team), and NFL great Tom Brady (Team Brady). Additionally, Hollywood actor Will Smith leads Westbrook Racing, while Marcelo Claure helms Team Brazil by Claure Group. The races will take place across iconic locations around the world including Jeddah, Miami, Monte Carlo and Doha *—PTI*

Rathod's 59 leads Vidarbha's grip in semi-finals

NAGPUR, 19 FEB

Yash Rathod and Akshay Wadkar shared an unbroken 91-run partnership as Vidarbha recovered from a mini collapse to lead by 260 runs against Mumbai at stumps on day three of their Ranji Trophy semifinal here on Wednesday. After Vidarbha dismissed Mumbai for 270 to take a first-innings lead of 113 runs, the hosts found themselves in trouble after being reduced to 56 for four, thanks to Shams Mulani's (2/50) two-wicket burst. At stumps, the duo, who train at the same academy in Nagpur, remained at the crease, but with Mulani and the spinners making the ball talk, Vidarbha are aware that the job is far from over, with two full days of play remaining. *—PTI*

Neymar joins artificial turf protest in Brazil

SAO PAULO, 19 FEB

Neymar, Memphis Depay and Thiago Silva are among the leading Brazilian footballers protesting against using artificial turf for league matches instead of natural grass. They all campaigned online with the same message Tuesday highlighting their fear of increased injury risk for players on the artificial surfaces. Some clubs in Brazil's top divisions are using artificial turf to allow for multiple uses for stadiums while minimizing damage to the playing surfaces. Neymar has just returned to Santos, Depay plays for Corinthians and Thiago Silva is at Fluminense. Defending Brazilian champion Botafogo, Palmeiras and Athletico Paranaense are among the clubs that have used artificial turf. *—PTI*

Despite challenges, India eye strong start at CT

In CT opener against B'desh, India aims to resolve key team concerns

Harshit Rana, Mohammed Shami, and Arshdeep Singh ***PHOTO: X / @BCCI***

DUBAI, 19 FEB

A turbulent recent cricketing past has made a resonant effort mandatory for India in the Champions Trophy, and their opening match against a tricky Bangladesh here on Thursday will be the first point in assuaging a set of existential questions surrounding this team.

They are vexing even for a pre-tournament favourite like India. Can this Indian bowling unit tide over the absence of injured pace talisman Jasprit Bumrah? Can Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma summon their glory days back? Can young names like Shubman Gill ace the pressure of a multi-nation competition to deliver consistently? In that context, the ICC showpiece is a godsend because ODI is the comfort zone of those icons and young tyros in this Indian line-up, and they will be genuinely eyeing a strong outing here.

It's imperative that they do so -- from a team and individual perspective.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Kohli, Rohit and even head coach Gautam Gambhir, although only six months into his tenure, are living on borrowed time because the shockwaves created by the setbacks against New Zealand and Australia have not subsided yet.

Some bright signs are there though. Skipper Rohit made a century a few days back against England and Kohli a fifty, while Gambhir masterminded the dominant 4-1 and 3-0 victories in T20Is and ODIs respectively.

Gill was exceptional while emerging as the player of the series, cracking two fifties and a hundred in three ODIs against England.

But the challenge India face in the Champions Trophy is vastly different from a rather cosy home series. PTI

Teams (from): India: Rohit Sharma (c), Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul, Rishabh Pant, Hardik Pandya, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Kuldeep Yadav, Harshit Rana, Mohammed Shami, Arshdeep Singh, Ravindra Jadeja, Varun Chakaravarthy.

Bangladesh: Nazmul Hossain Shanto (c), Soumya Sarkar, Tanzid Hasan, Tawhid Hridoy, Mushfiqur Rahim, MD Mahmud Ullah, Jaker Ali Anik, Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Rishad Hossain, Taskin Ahmed, Mustafizur Rahman, Parvez Hossai Emon, Nasum Ahmed, Tanzim Hasan Sakib, Nahid Rana. *—PTI*

All departments we have to play well to have any chance against India. If we execute our plan we have a good chance

-Najmul Hossain Shanto, Bangladesh skipper

India vs Bangladesh Match starts at 2.30 pm IST

Ponting backs Arshdeep over Rana for CT opener

Australian cricket legend Ricky Ponting has backed Arshdeep Singh over Harshit Rana to replace injured pacer Jasprit Bumrah in India's playing XI for their Champions Trophy opener against Bangladesh.

Speaking on The ICC Review, Ponting highlighted Arshdeep's versatility, stating that he can bowl effectively in all phases of the game, including the crucial death overs.

Ponting emphasised the importance of a left-arm pacer in big tournaments, especially against right-handed batters at the top order.

While acknowledging Rana's talent, he believes Arshdeep provides skills more similar to Bumrah.

Ponting also praised India's batting strength, noting that runs from Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli in the England series boost India's confidence heading into the tournament. *—Agencies*

PCB adds Indian flag at Karachi Stadium after controversy

Days after a controversy erupted over the absence of India's flag at Karachi's National Stadium ahead of the ICC Champions Trophy, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has placed it alongside other participating nations. Social media was abuzz with criticism, accusing Pakistan of intentionally omitting India's flag. However, visuals now confirm that the tricolor is displayed at the venue. The PCB clarified that flags were only raised at stadiums hosting teams' matches. *—Agencies*

New Zealand beat Pak in CT opener

KARACHI, 19 FEB

Pakistan's sluggish run-chase of 321 runs against New Zealand in their ICC Champions Trophy opener ended in a 60-run defeat. This marks New Zealand's fourth win over Pakistan in the tournament, having never lost to the defending champions.

Pakistan's chase faltered early with Saud Shakeel falling for just 6, followed by captain Mohammad Rizwan's dismissal for 3, leaving the team at 22/2 after 10 overs. Babar Azam (64) and Fakhar Zaman (42) briefly steadied the innings, but a conservative approach limited their progress. Fakhar was bowled out by Michael Bracewell, while Agha's 42 runs were not enough to turn the tide.

Babar reached his 35th ODI fifty in 81 balls but was eventually dismissed by Santner. Despite Khushdil Shah's fighting 69 and a quick 50 from Rauf, Pakistan was bowled out for 260 in 47.2 overs.

Earlier, New Zealand posted 320/5, powered by Tom Latham's 118 and Will Young's 107. Naseem Shah claimed 2/63 for Pakistan.

O'Rourke (3/47) and Santner (3/66) were the standout bowlers for New Zealand. Pakistan's next match against arch-rivals India will be a virtual knockout.

Score: New Zealand 320/5 (Latham 118, Young 107) beat Pakistan 260 all out (Shah 69, Azam 64) by 60 runs. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Gill beats Azam as top batter in ODI ranking

DUBAI, 19 FEB

India vice-captain Shubman Gill on Wednesday dethroned Babar Azam of Pakistan from the No 1 spot in the ICC ODI Rankings for batters on the back of his strong show against England in the recent home series.

The ICC issued the latest rankings just ahead of the start of the eight-team Champions Trophy in Karachi with the match between Pakistan and New Zealand.

"India right-hander Shubman Gill overtakes former Pakistan captain Babar Azam to become the top ranked ODI batter in the world," the ICC said.

Gill, who scored two fifties and a century in the recent three-match ODI series against England at home which India won 3-0, jumped one place to the No 1 spot. He now has 796 rating points compared to Babar's 773.

India skipper Rohit Sharma is placed at the third spot with 761 points followed by South Africa's Henrich Klaasen and New Zealand's Daryl Mitchell at fourth and fifth.

"This is the second time Gill has held the No1 ranking in ODI cricket, with he beating Babar to claim top spot midway through the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup in 2023.

Sri Lanka's Maheesh, has taken the first position in ODI rankings for bowlers. *—PTI*

DUBAI CHAMPIONSHIPS

Emma Raducanu gets stalker thrown out of arena

DUBAI, 19 FEB

It was concern over a man who had exhibited "fixated behaviour" that caused Emma Raducanu to approach the chair umpire in tears and take an unscheduled break in her second-round match at the Dubai Championships.

There was no immediate explanation on Tuesday when the 2021 US Open champion walked over to the umpire after the second game, said a few words and then stood in a small space between the back of the official's chair and the area separating the court from spectators. Raducanu, who was still a teenager in 2022 when a man in Britain was convicted of stalking her at her family home the previous year, returned to play after a brief pause at 2-0 down and eventually lost 7-6 (6), 6-4 to 14th-seeded Karolina Muchova. Several hours later, organisers of the women's tennis tour issued a statement explaining that Raducanu was approached in a public space on Monday "by a man who exhibited fixated behaviour" and "this same individual was identified in the first few rows during Emma's match on Tuesday ... and subsequently ejected." "He will be banned from all WTA events pending a threat assessment."

The chair umpire called tournament organisers immediately when Raducanu reported her concerns in the first set and Muchova walked over to console the 22-year-old British player.

Raducanu then picked up a towel, wiped her face, nodded and continued the match. She did not immediately comment on the incident. *—PTI*

Emma hides from 'fixated' fan, breaks down in tears mid-match ***PHOTO: X***

Alphonso Davies ***PHOTO: X***

Davies sends Bayern into last 16 of CL

MUNICH, 19 FEB

A kiss and a gesture to the badge. Alphonso Davies finally showed Bayern Munich some love on Tuesday when his goal sent the Bavarian powerhouse into the last 16 of the Champions League.

He scored the goal in the fourth minute of stoppage time for 1-1 draw with Celtic, sparing Bayern the ordeal of extra time in the second leg of the playoff. Bayern won the first leg 2-1 in Glasgow and so progressed 3-2 on aggregate.

"It was instinct," Davies said of his goal. "I'm happy to get another one."

The 24-year-old Davies, who only recently committed his future to Bayern by signing a new contract through June 2030, kissed the Bayern crest on his jersey and then pointed to it after he scored the goal. *—PTI*

Men's hockey team beats Germany in Pro League

MUMBAI, 19 FEB

India rode on Gurjant Singh's fine field goal to beat world champions Germany 1-0 in their return-leg FIH Pro League match at the Kalinga Stadium here on Wednesday.

This was after Germany defeated India 4-1 in the first leg match on Tuesday.

Gurjant scored in the fourth minute of the match from a field effort.

This was a marked improvement for India in every aspect of the game, especially after their thrashing on Tuesday.

The Indians started on the front foot and looked more purposeful and that showed in their game.

The hosts dominated for most part of the match, except for the fourth quarter when Germany attacked in numbers to draw parity.

But the Indian defence produced a resolute performance to thwart Germany's offensive forays.

Germany secured five of their total seven penalty corners in the final quarter but the Indian defence stood tall.

India, on the other hand, had just two penalty corner and they wasted both.

India played high press hockey from the onset that made Germany uncomfortable.

The hosts took the slightest of chances to attack inside the German half. *—PTI*

This was after Germany defeated India 4-1 in the first leg match on Tuesday ***PHOTO: PTI***

Novak Djokovic ***PHOTO: X***

Djokovic loses to Berrettini, says no pain in hamstring

DOHA, 19 FEB

Novak Djokovic was upset by Matteo Berrettini 7-6 (4), 6-2 on Tuesday at the Qatar Open in the Serb's first match since exiting the Australian Open with a hamstring injury.

The 37-year-old Djokovic, ranked No. 7, lost to the Italian for the first time in five career matches and will have to wait to join Jimmy Connors (109) and Roger Federer (103) as the only players in the ATP Tour's 100-win club.

The 24-time Grand Slam champion reached the Australian Open semifinals but retired from the last-four match against Alexander Zverev because of a hamstring injury.

Djokovic said he didn't have "any pain or discomfort."

Berrettini won for the 10th time in his career against a top-10 player and will face Tallon Griekspoor in the second round.

Also on Tuesday, No. 2 seed Alex de Minaur defeated Roman Safiullin 6-1, 7-5.

Andy Murray looks set to remain as Djokovic's coach likely through the French Open. *—PTI*

CONDOLENCES POUR IN

Mumbai ex-captain Rege dies of heart attack at 76

MUMBAI, 19 FEB

Former Mumbai captain and selector Milind Rege, a highly respected figure in domestic cricket, died after suffering a heart attack on Wednesday, just days after turning 76.

Rege, who turned 76 last Sunday, was admitted in the intensive care unit of the Breach Candy Hospital here and passed away around 6am on Wednesday morning. He is survived by his wife and two sons.

The all-rounder had suffered a heart attack at the age of 26 but returned to the cricket field and even captained Mumbai in the Ranji Trophy.

He played 52 First-Class matches between 1966-67 and 1977-78, taking 126 wickets with his right-arm off-break bowling. He also contributed with the bat, scoring 1,532 runs at an average of 23.56.

Legendary batter Sachin Tendulkar recalled Rege's contribution in the early days of his career.

"Sad to hear about Milind Rege sir's passing. He was a true Mumbai cricketer with immense contributions to the city's cricket. He and other CCI members saw potential in me and asked me to play for CCI, which, as I look back now, was a landmark moment in my career," Tendulkar wrote on 'X' in a tribute.

"He could pick out a talented player from a sea of hard-working hopefuls. He had a special sixth sense to pick talent at all levels, but especially at junior levels.

Ahead the Ranji Trophy semifinal, Mumbai and Vidarbha players observed a moment of silence as a mark of respect. *—PTI*

F1 kickstarts 2025 in Hollywood style

LONDON, 19 FEB

Formula 1 kick-started its 75th anniversary season with music, glitz and glamour as the race series aims to reach beyond a sports audience with a two-hour televised arena show.

Lewis Hamilton arrived wearing a tie in Ferrari red for his biggest event yet since joining the Italian team, before the seven-time champion emerged to rousing cheers in a full race suit to present the team's livery alongside teammate Charles Leclerc.

The F1 75 Live event at London's O2 arena was the first time the sport hosted its own large-scale launch event.

Drivers arrived on the red carpet for a show unlike any other event in F1 history which ended with all 20 drivers on a stage transformed into a grid, standing alongside cars in each team's 2025 livery. *—PTI*

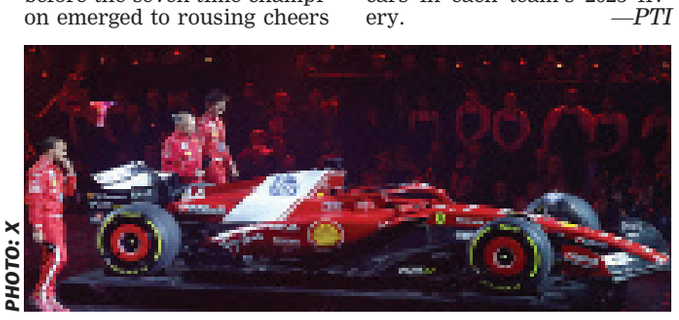


PHOTO: X